

AMBASSADOR GORDON S. BROWN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: December 11, 1996

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: This is an interview with Gordon S. Brown. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me a bit about when and where you were born, and something about your family?

BROWN: I was born in Rome, Italy. My family was the kind of family which I guess is just one that automatically looks at the Foreign Service as a potential career. My father was a newspaper man. He'd worked with the Herald in Paris and at the time I was born was working with the United Press in Rome where he was bureau chief.

Q: When were you born?

BROWN: I was born in 1936.

Q: High Mussolini.

BROWN: Yes. My father was covering things like the Balkans, Mussolini's activities in Africa, including Libya-Eritrea, and so on. He and my mother had met while he was in Geneva, and my mother was working for the League of Nations. They had made their way separately to Europe after college. My mother was an idealist who had gone to work for the League of Nations. I don't even know what kind of a job she had there. My father, who had always wanted to be a foreign correspondent, had gotten a loan from his college president to go off-he was from Arizona - and more or less pushed himself into international journalism, was a pretty good self-promoter, I guess. In any event, I was raised in Rome until the age of three. My first language being English, of course, with a little bit of kitchen Italian, and a little bit of kitchen German because our nanny was a Swiss-German. So foreign languages came easily. Knowledge of foreign affairs was natural, something that people learned around the house. We came back from Europe I think on the "Rex", if I'm not mistaken, which was one of the last of the big Italian liners. I'm told that it was even the last trip that that ship took before the war broke out - if I'm not mistaken, August or so of 1939. We lived in Washington during the war, and went back to Italy after the war with my father, who served in the Allied government. So my childhood had quite a bit to do with Italy, had quite a bit to do with foreign travel. So by the time we moved to California in 1948 I had already assumed that I was going to do some kind of work overseas as an adult. Our house had always been full of newspapermen and other people talking about politics and international politics. It was dinner table conversation. It was the kind of thing that set your mind in a particular direction. So by the time I got to college in California, Stanford, I was a political science major there and was looking at a career in journalism or in Foreign Service. So my childhood and everything else sort of pointed me in the direction of some kind of overseas activity. I didn't know whether it would be journalism or Foreign Service.

Q: You were in Stanford from when to when?

BROWN: From '53 to '57. I graduated in '57.

Q: Was Stanford more oriented towards the orient, Asia? How did you find it?

BROWN: Stanford had a very lousy political-science department at the time I was there. Stanford was in a period of institution building, and - I don't want to make this into a diatribe against the university - but I thought the university was really pretty weak. The head of the political-science department and my adviser was James Watkins, a fellow who was an idealist on the UN, and somewhat, I should say, in outer space even for the late 1950s. It terms of the specifics of things I studied which made me even more determined to take an international course - it really wasn't the standard set of courses in the poli-sci department. I had taken a trip to Europe at the end of my junior year and as part of that trip I wound up in Serbia and Montenegro in the days when there were no American tourists in that part of the world, and I was absolutely fascinated by it and came back and finished my senior year with a lot of courses from a professor, whose name escapes me for the moment, but who was a Serbian who had served in the Russian army, and had eventually come to the United States after the Second World War as a refugee. He was an ex-calvary officer, a very dashing, very brilliant, very interesting fellow, who talked about the Balkans and Balkan history in a way which was absolutely fascinating to me, not only because intrinsically the places are so interesting, but also because it was a place where major powers ran into each other even in the history that he was discussing, which was inter-war history largely, or early 20th century history. I think that convinced me that if I did a career in international relations I wanted to serve someplace, or be someplace, where US and Russian interests were in collision, and where you would see that and participate in that friction.

I finished my college career, as a result, with a certain amount of emphasis on Eastern European studies, which I never put to work in the Foreign Service. I never got to Eastern Europe at all professionally.

Q: You graduated in '57?

BROWN: Right.

Q: What happened?

BROWN: I went directly into the Army. In those days, of course, the draft was an option and I decided to get my national service behind me. I must say that decision was aided and abetted by the Board of Examiners because I had already sat for the Foreign Service exam before I graduated. I had taken the exam at the end of the junior year, before I took this trip to Europe, kind of as a lark to take the exam and see whether or not I was competitive on the theory that I would really take it when I finished college. I took it in New York before leaving for Europe, and when I was in Europe I got a postcard saying I had passed and would I please come back to Washington for the orals. And I did. I was six months in Europe, came back in December, came through Washington, took the orals. I remember being so relaxed during the interview that I was probably insolent. But at the end of the interview, the board (if I'm not mistaken, three or four people), made an instant decision and came to me sitting in the anteroom, and said, "You said you're 20 years old?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "If we turned you down, what were you going to do?" And I said, "Well, I suppose I'd go into the Army, and do my national service, and do a little more growing up, and then come back for another crack at you." They said, "We think you're good enough to be a Foreign Service officer, and we think we can offer you a commission. But we also think you should take your own advice and go out and grow up, because you're awfully young. This is a grown man's occupation." So when I was in the Army it was always in the knowledge that I would come out and work in the Foreign Service. So I obviously did something in the Army which was relevant, and I studied Russian in the language school.

Q: You were in the Army from when to when?

BROWN: That would have been '57 to '60, immediately upon graduation. I spent three years in the Army, studied Russian.

Q: The Army's school at Monterey.

BROWN: And I had a professor called Professor Yazikov, who was a most amusing guy; he could have been invented by Lewis Carroll. He used to come out with the most outrageous puns in Russian. I enjoyed learning Russian. I thought it was a ball, and I looked forward to a career in Eastern Europe. I put in for an assignment to Turkey.

Q: Were you part of the Army's security agency?

BROWN: Yes. The Army Security Agency, the people who listen to the telephones, and to the radios. I wanted to serve in Turkey where we had several listening posts, and thought that would be a marvelous combination of my Russian language and my Eastern European interests. And, of course, the Army in its wisdom, sent me to Alaska. Alaska was fine, it was interesting from the point of view of what I was doing, but it was nowhere near as interesting as Turkey would have been from the point of view of my professional interests. When I finally did join the Foreign Service in 1960 I came in again, as I say, thinking I was going to specialize in East Europe.

Q: Incidentally, we're both graduates of the Army language school. I graduated in '52-all of '51.

BROWN: Wooden barracks up on the hills...

Q: Oh, yes. I was in the 6th platoon.

BROWN: I can't remember my platoon, but I do remember my serial number. I don't remember my rifle number.

Q: I probably had some of the same teachers.

BROWN: Did you do Russian too?

Q: I was in the Air Force. You came in the Foreign Service in 1960?

BROWN: That's right.

Q: When in 1960?

BROWN: It was early July, I think. Or early August, I can't recall. It must have been August because it was the end of summer.

Q: Could you characterize, or describe a bit your A-100 course, the beginning officer course?

BROWN: I really don't recall it terribly well to be perfectly honest. Sandy Peaslee was our instructor. He died recently and I remember him very favorably. It's a long time ago and if I recall, we studied the structure of the US government, and a little bit of civics. The Foreign Service at this time, as you'll remember, was trying to get away from its East Coast elitist roots, and was recruiting people who really didn't have the background about how things worked in Washington. So a lot of it was spent on that. Not too much on trade craft. There was some on trade craft, how to write a cable and how to write an airgram and things like that. I don't recall terribly much about the course to be perfectly honest. It was sort of a general introduction, and I didn't think it was terribly profound.

Q: What were you asking for, and what did you get?

BROWN: Well, I was trying to stay under the table to be perfectly honest, because between the Army and my entry into the Foreign Service I had gone off to England to propose to my future bride, and we were at that point engaged. That was a point in which people who had any foreign languages, particularly French, were being sent off to West Africa by the shovel full, and I did not want to get sent off to West Africa with a new bride, or not even get married. As you recall in those days, you couldn't marry an alien.

Q: You technically resigned and usually they would either accept or not accept.

BROWN: Exactly. And our game plan had been that I would get my commission, get a hard piece of paper in my hand, and then announce our engagement and get married. So I joined the Foreign Service as an unmarried, but as a shadow married person. And obviously did not want after one month, or two months or whatever it was, of the A-100 course to be sent off to West Africa and have to cope with a marriage long-range.

Q: We're talking 1960 which was the year of the discovery by the United States of Africa. All these countries were becoming independent and we were really gearing up for a major opening of posts there.

BROWN: What was I thinking of as the assignment process drew near? I think all of us were dead afraid that we would get assigned to some place - because they read out your assignments in the course openly -that we would get assigned to a place we'd never hear of before and have to ask, where is it?, showing our ignorance.

The ploy, frankly, that I used to stay away from a West Africa assignment at that point was to pretend I knew no French. So I deliberately failed my French exam putting me into two...I can't remember whether it was two or four months... of remedial French, which was ideal because it got me over the hump of getting the commission, and getting married, and getting settled into the Foreign Service before the assignment came up. The French course was a gas, because, frankly, a couple of other people had done the same thing. There was a special course which was taught for those of us who were really at a 3 level but hadn't chosen to admit it. So we put on plays, and we did all kinds of silly things that were probably well beyond what FSI should have been allowing us to do.

Q: After you finished the French, what happened?

BROWN: I got assigned to INR, surprise-surprise. In fact, I got assigned to the Soviet branch of INR in a little office which had to do with Soviet propaganda, and we did counter propaganda. We analyzed it and looked at weaknesses, and tried to do counter-propaganda. After a while there I asked my boss (a civil servant by the name J.C. Crichton) the question I shouldn't have asked. I said, "Aren't they doing this at USIA? And isn't there somebody at CIA also doing this?" And Crichton, of course, who - like every good bureaucrat who was trying to build a little empire - got very angry at me for even asking the question. But it became academic after a while, because when the Kennedy people came in one of the first things they did, if you'll recall, was to send a lot of INR people over to the Agency, saying this is the Central Intelligence Agency, we don't need a bunch of researchers in the State Department and the Agency. My little office, which Mr. Crichton had been hoping to expand, was suddenly reduced to zero, and I was cast adrift. Because of my supposed Russian language skills, I wound up in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which at that point was getting together.

Q: I just want to get the dates. You were in INR '60...

BROWN: It couldn't have been more than two or three months that I was there.

Q: Still within 1960.

BROWN: Probably until about the end '60.

Q: The Kennedy administration came in in January '61.

BROWN: So I guess it must have been through February, or something like that.

Q: Then you went to the Arms Control? You were there from when to when?

BROWN: That again was a very short period, and I can't remember the dates. I was sent over to serve on the Secretariat for a negotiation on complete and total disarmament, which was supposed to start between Valery Zorin on the Russian side, and John McCloy on our side. It was my first experience in the rigors and horrors of bureaucracy, having previously done nothing but the A-100 course, and the silly time in INR. We in the Secretariat were responsible for getting the briefing and position papers for the negotiating team together from the secretarial point of view. We would attend meetings every day, in which the inter-agency representatives would thrash out two more paragraphs of deathless prose. Then we would go back in the late evening and run the hectographs until our fingers and arms were blue (or purple), distribute new copies of all of the position papers, and then the next day have everything re-negotiated and cut up again. It was a humbling experience because I realized how hard every word in our negotiating documents were fought over, and assumed that by the time Mr. McCloy got to the table he would have no negotiating flexibility whatsoever - which turned out to be the case. It appeared that Mr. Zorin had even less flexibility. So the net result of those negotiations was less than a week, if I'm not mistaken, of reading speeches to each other - at which point the negotiations collapsed, and I was once again without a job.

Q: To get a picture of this. These negotiations were 1961, basically real disarmament. What was the attitude? I mean, often the new boy on the block...the junior officer down there is essentially picking up vibrations. Were people really talking seriously about United States and the Soviet Union really disarming?

BROWN: No. In my opinion this was a kind of politically necessary negotiation which was not taken terribly seriously by the majority of people who were preparing for it. Mr. McCloy was known to be a tough person with a tough line on this, so we went in with that presumption. The task of the inter-agency process, as far as I could see, was to make sure that he didn't give anything away, which is the kind of task which inevitably gives the negotiator an iron-bound document which he can't deviate from. Whereas, I suspect, to the public and the press there were some attempt to make this look as if it were a serious negotiation. Seen from my vantage point, and mind you I was parachuted into this as a very junior officer, it wasn't.

Q: I understand, but I like to pick these up because I think possibly they have some pertinence.

BROWN: I had no experience in the field before, and not much experience in international negotiation. But by the time this charade was over, I saw it as a charade. I may not have felt that when I started, but by the end of it I felt that I'd participated in essentially an exercise which was designed to show that we were trying.

Q: I think often these things are very important for the junior officers because they help to form whom you became at a later date. I mean, seeing some of these things with a jaundiced eye. I know I had some of the same things in my first assignment about statistics and realizing how these could be manipulated. I never had quite the same awe of government statistics afterwards.

BROWN: I'm sure there were a lot of statistics in this. I suspect that, to be perfectly honest in retrospect, I probably never had a chance to read any of those papers that I was processing in any detail. I was purely a kind of a "go-fer" in this operation, and was viewing it really from the big end of the telescope, and what I saw was minuscule. But it allowed you to see patterns, and the pattern was that this was doomed to failure.

Q: We're talking about 1961 you left that job, and whither?

BROWN: Well, I didn't leave it...I beg your pardon, I did leave it but I was in limbo for maybe a month or so after the negotiation collapsed, and one of the deputy directors of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency saw this bright young, and available, body around and decided he needed a staff aide. I knew enough about myself at that point to know that I would make a lousy staff aide. I'm not meticulous in many of my work habits. I figured I was just going to wind up losing one thing too many, and wind up shortening my career all too early, and didn't want it. I was in a quandary: how do you refuse this senior Foreign Service officer who wants to be your mentor? And across my desk one day came a piece of paper saying that Arabic training had been opened up for junior officers. (it had previously been available only to mid-career officers). And I said, Arab world? It looks like a good place to study the interface between the Soviet Union and the United States. I'd studied a bit about the Arab world in the context of the Eastern Question in college. I said, That doesn't sound like a bad choice. It's certainly better than working in ACDA and falling on my face. So I signed up for Arabic. And I guess the Arabic course must have started in early spring: April-May '61.

Q: You took Arabic from when to when?

BROWN: I can't tell you the starting point, but let's say the starting point was spring, April or May. We did six months in Washington and then went to Beirut. I finished in the summer of '62.

Q: Were there many others taking Arabic with you? How big a course were you with when you started here in Washington?

BROWN: In Washington there were five of us in the course, of which I've kept up with two. I know where the fourth is, and I've lost track of the fifth entirely.

Q: It's a question that really will cover both the time in Washington and also Beirut. We'll talk more about the Beirut side. This is sort of a bolt-hole for you in a way to get away. Did you pick up during your Arabic training any spirit of the Arabist, or whither the Arabists. There's been a lot of things said about Arabists being either anti-Israeli or very pro-Arab, I mean, one thing or another. I was wondering what sort of spirit you got from your fellow officers, and yourself, towards the Arab world during your training?

BROWN: Well, clearly the faculty at FSI did everything they could to assure we saw things from the Arab point of view. Not so much here in Washington where there was only one teacher. But by the time we got to Beirut we were surrounded by Palestinians and Lebanese who were quite pro-Palestinian, as you might assume. The teaching materials at the time were heavily weighted towards...well on the oral side dialectical Lebanese (which was probably a mistake on FSI's part), but on the written side toward the press and radio commentaries of the time which were stridently anti-American. So an awful lot of what we read were Nasser's speeches, Baath speeches, Baath radio communications, etc.

Q: Baath...

BROWN: ...being the political party of Syria. Baath was not yet the governing party in Syria, nor in Iraq, but subsequently became that. It was a rival to the Nasserist Arab nationalists. But it was also an Arab nationalist party. In any event, we were certainly exposed to a tremendous amount of Arab nationalist rhetoric, and some of us inevitably absorbed some of it. Not that much. I think most of us were relatively cynical, but your pores were open. If you're dipped in something you eventually absorb some of it. There was obviously no indoctrination. We had area studies, if I remember, periodically, and they were rigorously analytical, and impartial. But living in the Arab world, studying Arabic every day, and reading the diatribes of Arab nationalists, either created a very powerful antigen (or whatever the word is), and made you nauseous, or allowed you to begin to understand a little bit about the way the Arabs viewed the rest of the world. So, yes, some kind of process of cultural understanding, and political understanding emerged - I don't think necessarily creating affinities or political partiality. But we were exposed pretty well to Arab nationalist thinking at the time.

Q: During this training in Beirut, how did that work?

BROWN: We worked in one wing of the Embassy, and we were exposed to the embassy to some degree, in the sense that we served as duty officers periodically, and were brought into some Embassy activities. But by and large, FSI was a separate operation. We were in class at least six hours a day with a certain amount of homework to do at night. At that point we were, I think, didactically, on a bum road. We spent far too much time on colloquial Arabic. The whole course at the end was 21 months. We must have spent most of the first year on colloquial Arabic, and only after that did we get into learning the vocabulary, and ability to communicate in a more literate form of Arabic. And -worse yet - it was not just colloquial Arabic, it was colloquial Lebanese, probably not the best dialect or best kind of colloquial to learn. It's kind of like learning English in Flatbush.

We recognized this at the time but it didn't really matter, I think probably there were many of us who rebelled against a little bit against it. The British had a school for studying Arabic in Lebanon too up in Shemlan. They studied all classical, and we thought that was wrong, too. Most of us wanted to be a little bit more toward the classical than not. Certainly not as focused as we were on colloquial.

Q: Did you do field trips and things of that nature?

BROWN: Towards the end of the course we did one field trip. My field trip was down to Egypt and Gaza, which was interesting. First trip to Egypt. First and last time I ever got to Gaza. I took a train across the Sinai. Flew up from Gaza in the UN plane, back to Beirut. It was an interesting trip. I was doing a paper, I guess, on the refugees in Egypt and in Gaza. We did a paper, yes, and I think each one of us did ours independently. I don't even remember if it was graded, it was simply a learning experience and an opportunity to get out and use Arabic.

Q: What about Israel? Since Arabists were going to spend all of their time practically...American Arabists talking about Israel and our strong ties in Israel, was there an effort made to let you both see Israel, and also to understand about that.

BROWN: I don't recall what we were exposed to in the area studies course while we were at FSI. I presume it was relatively straight up and down history of the Zionist movement, and history of Israel. There was no encouragement for us to go to Israel on our field trip. I don't remember anybody who did to be perfectly honest. The objective of the field trip was to speak Arabic. I guess at that point for a student to go off and speak Arabic with the Arabic speaking inhabitants of Israel would have been risky for them and for the student. So it wasn't encouraged. I myself never got to Israel until...we got there at the end of our stay in Lebanon. We took our first trip to Jerusalem while we were stationed in Lebanon.

Q: What was the feeling that you were getting from your teachers, and also from the embassy, what was the view of Nasser?

BROWN: Let me back up a bit on that last bit. I didn't get to Israel on that trip from Lebanon. I got to the West Bank. I didn't get to Israel until later.

Q: That part of Israel until the '67 war.

BROWN: The view of Nasser. Well, Nasser was looked on as a pain in the ass as far as American interests were concerned. But also the person who could in the end be counted on to, in a sense, deliver the Arabs if there ever was going to be movement towards peace with Israel: it depended on Nasser's readiness to move that way. So we were presented him during the course, and afterwards, as somebody whom we wanted to deal with but had a hard time dealing with, and with whom we were inevitably going to be in a very arm's length, prickly, and adversarial relationship. He was also painted, obviously, as the great motivator of Arab nationalism, quite often anti-American Arab nationalism. So the picture of Nasser was certainly one which I would say was more negative than positive, but there was a fair amount of positive in it because he was the person who, it was assumed, could mobilize the Arabs if it ever became in his self interest to make peace.

Q: What was your impression of the influence of Nasser while you were in Lebanon going down to the souk and that sort of thing?

BROWN: I think the Lebanese, by and large, will put on whatever face they think you want them to have on. So I never was convinced that I ever got a straight answer from any Lebanese about anything. If they saw an American, they were pro-American; if a Russian had walked in, they would be pro-Russian. So I think what we learned in the souk in Lebanon was probably irrelevant. We were probably in many ways, most of us - this being our introduction to the Arab world - were probably too naive to understand much of the nuance and innuendo in holding an Arabic discussion.

Q: Was there a Mr. Arabist at the institute?

BROWN: I don't think so. When I think of my colleagues many of them have become prominent: David Mack, Hume Horan, Dick Parker, who worked in the embassy itself. At this point - I can't remember, but none of them was the leader of the pack. Hume was always one of our most brilliant linguists. He and Norman Anderson, I suppose, were the two most gifted in their ability to speak the language. But none whom I recall who was, if you want to say, Mr. Arabist, or dean...

Q: I was wondering if there was a middle-grade officer who was sort of supervising, or working as a mentor.

BROWN: Not particularly. At least my recollection is that it was a group of individual students struggling their way through the course. I can't remember the name of the first director of the course; he was replaced by Ray Chamberlain, and the deputy was Warren Benedict who was a professional educator.

Q: So it was just the language.

BROWN: Yes, language and area studies.

Q: You got out of the training in '62. How did you feel your Arabic was? How prepared were you?

BROWN: I suppose I was fairly smug, as one is (if you'll recall from Army Language School), because you've passed the exam, and you've survived pretty well. You don't realize until you get into the real world how much of a controlled situation you've been in. One of my first experiences when I got to my post was when the ambassador asked me to serve as translator for the Yemeni ambassador who was coming in. The Yemeni ambassador spoke with a rather strange dialect, it clearly wasn't Lebanese or Palestinian, and he had a lisp to make it worse. I was literally stumbling during the entire courtesy call. I think at that point I felt that the ambassador thought I must be a blithering idiot: Who was this person from FSI who couldn't even communicate the amenities of a courtesy call?. So it was quite a shock to discover how little I actually knew.

Q: Where were you assigned in '62?

BROWN: We were assigned to Iraq, and I was assigned as sort of the clean-up batter in the administrative section. I did personnel, security, travel. All the things that either the GSO or admin officer wouldn't do.

Q: You were in Iraq from when to when?

BROWN: '62 to '66-that's wrong because I must have gotten there in '63. '63 to '66. I earlier said I that I had left training in '62, because I was almost two years in training.

Q: In '63 when you went there, this was five years after the overthrow of the Hashemites. What was the situation as you saw it in Iraq in 1963?

BROWN: Well, again, it's amazing when you look back how little you actually knew. Abd al-Karim Qasim, who had been dictator in Iraq for a number of years after the Hashemites were overthrown, had just been overthrown himself - I believe in February - and we must have gotten there in June or July. The new government was a nationalist government, not particularly pro-Nasser, not Baathi. It was Arab nationalist, and the president was a fellow called Abdul Salam Aref. At the time, we were bothered by the pro-Arab nationalist, anti-American tone of the government. But I think in retrospect it probably was the high point of our relationship with Iraq since the fall of the Hashemites, because these were basically military pragmatists who wanted to run their state independent of Nasser, so they stayed away from too much Nasserist rhetoric. They did not want the Baath to overthrow them so they kept a good deal of distance between themselves and the Baath party in Syria, and were running a fairly forward-looking modern, secular, semi-militarist Arab nationalist regime. We had a major dispute with them about the nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company properties: Public Law 81, I can't recall exactly. That was the major irritant in our relations. We had cut off aid, of course, because they hadn't paid compensation. I think you're right- it was the Hickenlooper Amendment. So what was poisoning our relationships was that specific issue, the existence of Arab nationalism, and our support for Israel - as a background kind of complication to our relations. And, of course, our presumed involvement in the Kurdish insurgency which was going on at the time. So our relations with the Iraqi regime were not good, but they weren't bad either in retrospect. We were communicating with them, we talked with them, and they spoke in relatively reasonable terms.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

BROWN: Bob Strong, who was one of the old hands of the Near East Bureau. He headed the Near East office before he came out to Baghdad, an phlegmatic and rather interesting man but one who had most of his staff in fear of him. I was probably too stupid to be afraid of him.

Q: How did this translate?

BROWN: He had a reputation, I guess, for being ruthless in his evaluation of people's careers. I was too far down, I think, to be directly threatened - but most of the section chiefs were quite scared of the ambassador. The DCM was perhaps not the best interlocutor between a tough ambassador and a scared staff. It was a happy enough embassy, but the relationships with the front office were not that warm. It wasn't a collegial place to work.

Q: I imagine coming out of Arabic and find yourself down at the bottom of the administrative section must have been sort of a shock to you.

BROWN: Well, I remember Hume Horan, who had just come out of Baghdad where he had been General Services Officer, had told me he had spent half his tour with his hands down in toilets (figuratively), and he had found it very enriching. So I tried to be positive about this. Hume is always positive, and I tried to model myself on him. But you're right, I did not find it all that exciting to process personnel actions, and worry about the security of the compound, when I'd been trained in Arabic and thought I was going to be a hot shot reporter.

Q: Were there any particular things that you had to deal with that might be interesting?

BROWN: Well, as security officer, of course, I had to deal with the Iraqi police, which was an experience which I think was very useful, but not particularly enlightening. Periodically they would arrest some of our employees and I would have to go down and beg them not to crush their fingers. I'm saying that in an illustrative fashion but Iraqi police even in the best of times were not exactly gentle with people they arrested, and they never would tell us why they had picked up our employees, and give any excuse when they released them. And the employees would never speak to us frankly because they were scared. Iraq has never been a pleasant place to run afoul of the law. I remember going down to talk to some of these police officers, and have them tell me about how much they had enjoyed the training they had gotten from the anti-insurgency courses we had trained them in. And I thought that there was something wrong with our foreign policy that we were training these people to maltreat our local employees.

Q: Again, I realize you're looking at it from the point of view of taking care of personnel actions, but did you pick up any emanations about how we viewed Soviet influence in Iraq?

BROWN: Obviously the departure of Qasim had created a great plus for us in a sense, because Qasim had been perceived as very pro-Russian. At the time, Baghdad was a much more friendly place than it presumably had been a few years before. When we first went to Baghdad and showed up in the market, we were greeted by shopkeepers who would say "Zdrasdvytie," because they thought that having blue eyes or fair hair meant we were inevitably going to be Russian. But the world had changed, and the regime was much less pro-Russian. And yes, we saw Russia as a big complicator in terms of our relationship with not only Iraq but the Arab world in general. By this time, most of the anxiety had shifted to how far Nasser was going to play footsie with the Russians, because the Iraqi regime was definitely, if not anti-Russian, at least equally anti-Russian and anti-American.

Q: Did you get any feel for our pro-Israeli policy at this point? Or was this somewhat removed?

Q: Gordon, we talked about relations with the Russians and how it was done, so we're going to have to do a bit of back-tracking on this. You're in Iraq. What was your job?

BROWN: My job...I think this was covered on the previous side of the tape, was in the beginning in the administrative section. But when I went back to Washington for home leave at the end of the first year of my assignment in Baghdad, I intended to go in and complain and ask for an early transfer out because I thought I was wasting my Arabic language in that situation. And, much to my surprise, when I went in to the Department to make my complaint, I discovered that I had been transferred within the embassy to the political section - where I was going to be in charge of our program to contact and identify promising young Iraqi potential leaders: this being at that point a priority of our government (if you remember Robert Kennedy's insistence that our ambassadors spend more time identifying the leaders of the future).

Q: I might add that we had the same thing in Yugoslavia at this point and there was a certain reluctance because, at least during the Tito time which lasted almost another 20 years, the old guys were still doing it. I mean it was a little hard to pick up young leaders who were really going to go any place at that time. Could you talk a bit about how you went about this?

BROWN: Well, to be perfectly honest, it was something we sort of concocted. And, since we had almost no access to the lower levels of Iraqi bureaucracy because the Iraqi government was very strict in its procedures, (they put even a third secretary at a level where he had to see an office director), we were unable to identify the people who actually might be moving up in the bureaucracy. So we decided to go even a lower level, and try to reach out to people at the university level. I went to Baghdad University and helped set up cultural affairs programs (I should explain that as youth officer I was assigned to USIA as the assistant cultural affairs officer and I was doing the usual cultural things: cultural presentations, and bringing lecturers in, and so on), I would try to go to the university and set up the lecturers to meet with the most prestigious, or most likely future leaders, in the university. By and large, however, the people we brought over were sports figures, coaches, academics on middle eastern history, or American political science, or something like that, and we were speaking mostly in the faculties which were lower down the pecking order in Baghdad University, like the faculties of law, faculty of sports, and the faculty of sociology - a faculty in which I myself was registered as a student. And we were not really getting to the students in the schools of engineering and medicine, which were places where in fact the brightest students went- in fact where the most politically active students were present. So I think probably we didn't have much success in identifying leaders. I do remember doing the equivalent of Rolodexes and drawing up biographies of people on the basis of my rather random contacts around Baghdad University. But I think in the end we didn't do terribly much more than teach them the fastest way to the American Library - so that they could burn it down in '67!

Q: You said you were taking a course dealing with tribal politics.

BROWN: Right. As a student, or an auditor, in the sociology department (I had to get my entree where I could, and this is a course which I found interesting, both to myself and to the embassy from what it taught us about Iraqi society). The professor was a very interesting fellow, and the students were interesting at a personal level. I enjoyed meeting a lot of them and palling around with them: going on field trips. But I don't think I learned terribly much that was useful to the US government youth program. It was useful to me personally, understanding how Iraqi society worked - because it was a tribally based society. The official ideology at that time, of course, was that this was a modern state and had by-passed tribalism. Therefore, what I was doing at the university was seen as a little suspect. I may be the only Foreign Service officer I know of who was the direct subject of a Foreign Ministry note- a note eventually came out from the Iraqi authorities, a circular to all embassies in Baghdad, saying that henceforth auditing at the university was forbidden to all diplomats. So I was kicked out of the university - although I continued to go, even though I was no longer officially an auditor.

Q: Do you think as far as the reporting that we sort of kept tribal associations in mind? I'm thinking of today where Saddam Hussein who is the dictator of Iraq, I mean his roots are tribal aren't they?

BROWN: His roots are familial really rather than tribal - a group of families up around Samara and Tikrit are his basic source of support. And, yes, I think that tribalism is extremely important in understanding how Arab societies work, and I tend to be amazed at the degree to which the American embassies report on political currents in Arab countries as if the political parties existed as real powers in their own right. Whereas I think quite often the political party is a front for a particular group of tribes, or a particular group of family interests. You really have to look behind the political labels to discover the families and tribes that are active. I've carried this prejudice with me. I think that anthropological and sociological analysis is sometimes much more relevant than political analysis in looking at Arab and traditional cultures. I think I learned that in Iraq - if I hadn't learned it before, it certainly was cemented in Iraq. The Iraqi politics are familial politics. As we see with the Kurds today, who are unable to agree amongst each other about much - when they've been given the most obvious chance for autonomy and independence they've ever had, or at least had in the last 40 years, and they're blowing it because the two leading Kurd families can't get together.

Q: Could we touch a bit on relations with some of the surrounding countries. How was the Kurdish situation viewed at the time you were there?

BROWN: Let me go to one point which might have been covered earlier, but that I want to look at again. Iraq, because it was trying to keep its independence from Arab nationalism as led by Nasser at the time, was careful and quite correct in its relationships with its neighbors, specifically Jordan - which was itself trying to keep independent from Nasser's pressure - and also with Iran. Iraq's relationships with Iran were correct and fairly good. Its relationships with Syria went up and down depending on the extent to which Iraqi politics were meddled in by the Baath party, which was headquartered in Syria. I think by that time already the Syrians - I mean the Baathis - were in power in Damascus. And there were various Baath coup attempts in Iraq while we were there. So the relationship with Syria was much more strained than it was with Jordan or Iran. The relationships with Iran were quite open. The border was open, trade moved fairly well - as much as it can between two countries with similar economies. The Iraqis were spending, for example, a good deal of money on a sugar plantation right at the border of Iran, so that they could have minimal security anxiety as far as Iran was concerned. Iran, however, was meddling in Kurdistan, as were the Israelis, as were probably we, and that was an irritant to our relations with the Iraqis because our friends - the Iranians and the Israelis - were meddling, keeping Kurdistan heated up against the central regime.

Q: Why would we be involved if we had correct trade relations with Iran?

BROWN: Well, I've never been quite sure - probably we are not quite sure -of the degree to which we were involved. I certainly know that the Israelis and the Iranians were, given our intelligence relationships with those regimes. I always assumed that there was an American presence back there too, and I think all of them had interest in keeping Iraq destabilized. Iraq has always been a potential power, and potential trouble, in the Middle East - and I think keeping it weak and disorganized was to our advantage at that point. Certainly it would seem to be to the advantage of the Iranians and the Israelis. It probably played into Nasser's hands, which was not necessarily in our interest.

Q: What about Kuwait?

BROWN: Kuwait was not a major feature of our relationship with Iraq, or even Iraqi politics. Our relationship with Iraq was fixated on one issue, and that was the compensation issue for the seized oil properties, and was pretty much driven by that. Kuwait lurked in the background as a potential irritant, because Iraq certainly was - at least rhetorically- pushing its claim to Kuwait as the lost 19th province, and had never dropped its claim there. In fact, I think several years before, it threatened to invade Kuwait, which at that time precipitated a British expeditionary force to protect Kuwait's independence vis-a-vis Iraq. It didn't so much irritate our relations as British relations, because at that time the British were still the guardians of Kuwait.

Q: Did the British have any influence in Iraq at that time?

BROWN: Yes, but less with each passing year, I think, because as the ex-colonial power they were looked upon slightly askance. They had supported the Hashemites up until the coup. They had influence and they had access, because many of the Iraqis at that point...there was a good, and still important, Iraqi bourgeoisie which had been trained quite often in Turkey or particularly in England, who were English-oriented, and English-centered. So that gave British interests a particular entree which we didn't have. But we were seen as more powerful, and more relevant than the British.

Q: You left there in 1966, and where did you go?

BROWN: Went directly to Cairo, where I had been assigned to the economic section.

Q: You were in Egypt from when to when?

BROWN: From the summer of '66 to the summer of '69, with a gap which I will explain later. When I got to Egypt I was junior officer in a large economic section in a situation in which our embassy was really underemployed and overstaffed. Our relationships with Nasser's regime had gone downhill over the previous years. Our staff was cut off from many working contacts with the Egyptian bureaucracy. We, in fact, were quite often scrapping amongst ourselves in a very unseemly manner about who was going to talk to whom in the Egyptian bureaucracy, because at various times there were only ten or so people who would speak to us - the designated contacts of the American embassy, more or less. It was hard for a junior officer to make new contacts, hard for a junior officer to get out and really do good work because the sources of information had dried up. Official Egyptians were scared and would not talk to us. As a junior officer my responsibility was to follow the oil industry, and to follow a few other extractive industries, the phosphate industries, and others. We had a huge section. The A.I.D. economic analysis division and we were combined in one joint economic section. We were all frustrated. It was immensely difficult to get information. I remember the professional economist on the A.I.D. staff tearing what little hair he had left out. We were an unhappy embassy to be perfectly honest.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BROWN: Luke Battle was the ambassador.

Q: What was the feeling towards Nasser? You arrive at an embassy, and you talk to the other officers. Was the feeling that we were doing something that maybe we shouldn't of done, or should have been doing, that we weren't, or that Nasser was impossible. What was the feeling?

BROWN: I think our infatuation with Nasser had kind of run out. When Nasser came to power, if you'll recall, he had some relatively important American connections. He knew people in the American embassy. We thought this is a guy we might be able to work with. But over the years from '53 to '66, by the time I got there, that had gradually evaporated. We'd had too many crises, too many negotiating deadlocks, too many failure to delivers on both sides, and we were quite thoroughly disillusioned with each other. The view in our embassy was it was really almost impossible at this point to assume that Nasser would play a positive role with respect to peace in the Middle East, and that we had kind of run out. And I think we were sitting there waiting for something to happen in a sense.

Q: Was there any attempt to sort of down size, or anything?

BROWN: Again, I was a very junior officer. No, I got the impression that we were going to sit there and tough it out and pretend we were still important just because we were large. But we weren't important anymore. The A.I.D. relationship had dried up, we didn't have any leverage with the Egyptian government, Nasser. And we had come to the point at which we decided to have a correct relationship, but we could live without a productive relationship.

Q: What were we doing with aid?

BROWN: A lot of feeding programs if I'm not mistaken, for urban poor, and I suppose also for refugees in the Gaza came through Egypt. I don't remember much else because there weren't many capital projects, but there was still a large A.I.D. mission. And I really do not recall what they did. It shows how irrelevant it probably was.

Q: Were you and your wife able to get out into Egyptian society?

BROWN: To a certain degree, yes. The middle grade bureaucrats never became open to us and it was hard for us to get to know them. There was a certain group of Egyptians who were pro-western, middle class, and who sought out westerners, and whom we saw a fair amount of. The inhabitants of the Gezira Club. We didn't have good friends amongst the Egyptians, but we had enough friends so that we felt we knew some Egyptian families fairly well. They were ones who were already probably under surveillance by the Egyptian intelligence as being pro-western and potentially disloyal.

Q: Did you all feel the hand of Egyptian intelligence?

BROWN: We didn't feel it so much but we saw it reflected in our attempts to make friends with the Egyptians, yes. There were certain people who wouldn't see us, or would see us only in national day receptions type things, would meet us in a coffee shop or something like that, wouldn't come to our house. The Egyptians knew that anybody who had close relationships with western embassies was followed, was watched, and they didn't like to complicate their lives. So our relationships with normal Egyptians were flavored by the intelligence apparatus.

Q: What was your impression of the Egyptian economy, and where was it going?

BROWN: It was one of those parables that the economy shouldn't really exist, or shouldn't really be in balance at all, because it's always been going downward. And yet it seemed to hang in there. Cotton was still the mainstay of their economy, and cotton was clearly not as good a product to market internationally as it had been before. They weren't making as good money from it. Their mills were not doing as well as they had. Synthetics were coming in and competing very hard. They had state marketing boards which were inefficient and not price sensitive. So they were having real trouble with that. They were still in an effort to try to build up heavy industry, and they were building all these Soviet-style industries which were probably a negative factor on economy one way or another. But they were methods to employ people in the towns, and the population growth problem was just beginning to really balloon in the way that it has over the last 30 years - to levels in which it was gobbling up all national growth. There still was prospect for growth in the Egyptian economy, but the prospect for growth on the population side was even higher. It wasn't a hopeless situation, but it was one of those situations in which it was very hard to see how they were going to dig their way out of it.

Q: This sort of unpromising feel, how did things lead up to what amounted to the '67 war from your perspective?

BROWN: To be perfectly honest the '67 war sort of sprung out at us. I was caught particularly off guard, I suppose partly due to my preoccupation with economic issues, and partly due to the fact that for the month preceding the war, and the crisis, I had been involved in some other crisis down in the Yemen. At that point, if you'll remember, the Egyptians were occupying the Yemen as the supporters of the nationalist regime which had overthrown the Imam. His followers were still on the hills, conducting guerrilla warfare supported by Saudi Arabia, and we were indirectly partners to that whole process - as you can imagine. At least it was assumed we were, because we were supporting the Saudis, and the Saudis were supporting the royal family. Ergo, it was assumed we were supporting the royal family.

There had been a crisis in our relationships with the Yemen, an event probably concocted by Egyptian intelligence, in which there had been an explosion in one of the ammunition dumps of the Egyptian army in Taif. It had led to rioting against our branch embassy office in Taif. Our embassy office had been ransacked, and the staff expelled, and two people were arrested. The embassy itself was up in Sanaa; couldn't get officers down to Taif. Since the Egyptians were so heavily involved in all of this, our embassy in Egypt got in the middle of the act and said we wanted to send a group of people down from Egypt to the Yemen, to help clean up and straighten up this mess. Dick Parker, who at that point was political counselor in Cairo, led a team of three or four of us down to the Yemen. We were there for maybe three weeks, during which the Suez crisis erupted. We were shocked that it had erupted because it erupted more or less unexpectedly. I don't even recall what the trigger was at this point.

Q: Before we talk about that, could we talk about what you did in the Yemen? What was the situation when you got there? What did you all do?

BROWN: We cleaned out the embassy office, and cleaned out the houses of the people who had been expelled, in an effort to return to the government its property (much of which was scattered all over the floors of the embassy), and to return to individuals much of their personal property. And, frankly, to break up some of the things we hoped the Yemenis wouldn't realize that we had had in the embassy - cryptographic and other equipment. The Yemenis were extremely suspicious, and they watched us pack things up as we brought them out, and everything that looked at all electronic was considered to be spy equipment. It was an endless haggle and negotiation. Dick Parker himself left after about a week, leaving the rest of us to cobber this thing together ourselves. It was an endless negotiation getting things out administratively. We were cleaning up the mess, trying to restore a little bit of order to the American government's and private property.

Q: What about the people who had been arrested?

BROWN: Some of the members of the embassy staff, Rocky Suddarth among them, were babysitting those people up until the time they were released - which I think was shortly after we left. But during all of this period, we were only aware of the growing crisis up at the Suez area by the radio. Of course we had no guidance from the embassy because we were cut off at that point. We had no communications, having destroyed all of the communications equipment.

Q: When did you get back?

BROWN: I'm not sure I know the date, but I think we returned to Cairo about the last week of May sometime, and I returned to the embassy to find my wife and children in line to get their shots so that they could be evacuated the next day...or even that afternoon. I think they were evacuated that afternoon on planes. We then in the embassy hunkered down and waited to see whether the war would break out. I recall the return to Cairo was a little bit of a shock because we came out from the Yemen through Asmara, I think, where we were told that Nasser had backed down and called off his blockade in the Straits of Tehran, and we proceeded to get drunk on that basis, and think, well, the crisis is over and sanity has been restored. And then we got back to Cairo and found out that wasn't the case at all. In fact our families were leaving because the embassy foresaw that the situation was getting worse. And indeed it continued to slip down. At this point, of course, we were without an ambassador. I think it was in that week that the new ambassador, Dick Nolte, arrived - with Battle having left I suppose several months before. Dick Nolte arrived as the new ambassador-designate, and as things slipped down to the outbreak of war the Egyptians got more and more nervous, and one of the reasons we realized they'd gotten nervous is they called us on about the 3rd of June. It was after the government had changed in Israel, and Dyan and his friends had come in to the government - and that was a clear sign that trouble was getting closer, at least as far as the potential for outbreak of military activity was concerned. They called around and ask Mr. Nolte if he wouldn't come around please and present his credentials so he could be the official representative of the United States instead of just the ambassador-designate. In fact on the morning of June 5th the embassy staff was gathered in front of the embassy waiting for the signal from the palace, so that we could start the cavalcade and go over to the palace and present the letters of credence. And in fact what came was not a message from the palace, but a message on the radio saying that the Israeli air force had struck. Things were obviously wrong before we got that message. I still remember that, standing around, why the delay?, and how we found out.

Q: What happened then?

BROWN: During the war, of course, the 5 day war, we sort of hunkered down and watched the planes fly over, and the crowds march, and listened to the radio. Basically the Egyptians were getting their clocks cleaned out in the Sinai. They were trying to withhold the information from the Egyptians, so we were listening to BBC. We were reporting on what was going on in Cairo, which was essentially unclear, not just to the foreign community, but to all the Egyptians too. The average Egyptian did not know what was going on and was listening to the international radio just to find out. At first they didn't believe it, until the troops started flowing back across the canal - or those who made it back.

Then, if you will recall, the night of maybe June 10th or something like that, Nasser resigned and the mobs came out and circled our embassy, and we thought we were in for a bad night of it. The Egyptian police were very good and kept them away. Our embassy is very close to the center of town in Cairo, and there must have been a quarter million people out there on the square, just three blocks away. The police kept them away but our library had been burned a few years beforehand - the library was in the same compound - so we were aware of the possibility of torching.

Q: Did you have any contacts with the Egyptians? Were you hearing the idea that it must have been Americans airplanes that hit the Egyptian airports. Or did that come up later?

BROWN: We were hunkered down, frankly. At my level we weren't encouraged to go out and start idle conversations with the Egyptians, and what we were hearing was almost entirely from the radio. My recollection was that Nasser was saying on the radio that these were American planes, and that was one of the reasons why we were so worried about the crowds. We finally were evacuated by train from Cairo down to Alexandria, it must have been the 11th or 12th of June, I don't recall what date it was, but it was after all the shooting was over. Then we were evacuated by boat to Greece. It all seemed rather stupid at that point to be evacuated because everything was over. Four members of the embassy were left behind to be an interests section in the Spanish embassy, and I obviously was not one of them.

Q: What did you do when you went to Greece?

BROWN: Joined up with my family, which of course was enjoyable because I hadn't really seen them except that one afternoon for almost a month. Most of the American community was staying up in the hills above Athens, in a town called Kifisia, and my wife had been very enterprising and found friends who had friends who were going on home leave that summer, so she had gotten a house, whereas everybody else was in hotels. She had gotten a lovely house with a view over the hills surrounding Athens, down toward Athens. We all went into the embassy, really to see the ambassador and ask if there was anything we could do. There was a special area for the people who had been kicked out. Most of the time we were told no, so there wasn't much for us to do so we sat around and enjoyed Athens - which was certainly easy.

After about a week or maybe ten days, some of us, from the military and others who were a little bit faster, perhaps, began to reassign their people - on the theory there was no sense keeping them in hotels for the indefinite future. They began to get reassigned. We were fortunate enough to have a place, so we gave a party for all of our friends in the embassy and invited everybody up to our place (which had a beautiful terrace overlooking the hills of Athens.) We had a marvelous party, and on the theory that I wasn't going to have to go to work the following morning, I probably overdrank.

I remember waking up early in the morning with a banging headache, and a call from my Cairo boss saying, "Gordon, they want you to go to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia." And once again, I wonder sometimes how long it took me to understand what was really going on. But I was once again a little too naive, and perhaps a little too much of a Boy Scout; just having been "saving our bacon" down in Yemen. So like a good Boy Scout, I saluted and went off to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia a couple of days later - without even waiting for the formality of a visa; I just figured I could talk my way in. I discovered later that many of my colleagues had been approached for this same "choice" assignment, and found some way to make themselves absent, sick or otherwise unavailable when the opportunity was offered them. So I was the only guy stupid enough to go down to Dhahran. And I left my wife and family after a couple of weeks in Athens and went off to Saudi Arabia. It was supposed to be a 30 day TDY, and it turned out to be a relatively extended TDY for various reasons. The consul there kept pretending that he needed me, which wasn't really the case. He really just wanted to take advantage of the availability of an extra body to build up his staff.

Q: Who was the consul?

BROWN: Art Allen. The other reason (for the long TDY) being that, by that time, it had already been decided that I was going to be on a short list of people to go back to Cairo if we were able to expand the embassy there. They didn't see any reason for taking me out of the parking orbit that I'd just been put into in Dhahran, and putting me in another parking orbit. "So let him stay in Dhahran." I stayed in Dhahran, and at the end of 30 days I called people and said, "My TDY is about to expire, what do I do now?" And they said, "Stay." And on the 59th day I was on the line again, saying, "My TDY...what do I do now?" By this time, my wife had gone back to England - which is where her family home is. I was told at the end of 59 days, well, Forget it - we are going to keep you there because we don't know what else to do with you. We don't care if you're not doing anything worthwhile, etc. Actually, I was doing things which, in retrospect, turned out to be very interesting. I traveled down the Gulf. Dhahran was at that point still responsible for reporting on Gulf affairs.

Q: Was there an UAE at that time?

BROWN: There wasn't. It was in the process of being formed. Even Kuwait did not have an American embassy. So Dhahran reported on all those places, and it gave me a chance to travel in all those areas long before they became filthy rich. It was interesting to have that counterpoint, subsequently - I had a starting point for seeing how those places developed. But to me, one or two trips down the Gulf were enough. There wasn't terribly much to report on, and after I'd seen them, I'd seen them, and I didn't want to spend my time traveling back and forth. And there wasn't anything for me to do in Dhahran.

Q: Did you deal with ARAMCO?

BROWN: Well, as a new boy, and as a TDYer I wasn't really given any clear field of responsibility. I was given jobs ad hoc. Of course, you dealt with anybody who wanted to see you, but I was junior, and there were already people around who were designated as ARAMCO point of contact.

Q: So it left you for the high life of Dhahran and Dammam.

BROWN: Well, and reporting on the reaction of the people in Ras al Khaymah to the war! I'm sure those cables were read with great interest in Washington. It was interesting from a personal development point of view, but it was not terribly valuable to the US government, and I was champing at the bit. So I may be one of the few Foreign Service officers who ever went AWOL from a TDY. In the end, I called enough people in Washington and elsewhere to discover that they really didn't give a damn where I was. All they wanted to do was make sure they didn't have to pay anything additional to what they were paying at that point, which was my TDY per diem in Dhahran. They were looking at it purely as "Gordon's in parking orbit; we've got so much money budgeted to keep him in parking orbit, and as long as he doesn't disturb that equation we don't really care." So I took the bull by the horns and told Art Allen that I was going to Bahrain for a holiday over the weekend. I think this was about the end of 90 days. And, indeed, I went to Bahrain that weekend, but what he didn't know was that I took the next plane out to London. I never bothered to phone Art to tell him I was not coming back. I felt badly about it subsequently because he was a decent guy, but he was really off base thinking that he could get me on his staff by virtue of an endless extension of TDYs with no job description. I just wasn't going to put up with that, so I didn't. I went to London and called my friends in Washington and said, "All right, I'm now in London; please regularize my situation, I don't need any per diem because my wife is here on temporary quarters and just allow me to stay here." They said all right. So, I didn't have to go back to Dhahran, and I stayed in London. That must have been by that time October; I stayed in London for the Fall. I didn't go back to Egypt.... I was finally reassigned to Egypt about Christmas time, and went just after Christmas.

Q: So we're talking about the end of '67, and you were there through a part of '69.

BROWN: Yes. We were there for two years after the war. That was a very interesting period because not only was the embassy reduced from its ridiculous staffing levels of the 1967 period, but dialogue with the Egyptians had opened up. We were an interest section in the Spanish embassy, six people, which meant I had a real role. I was reporting on domestic political events, which included treason trial of Marshal Amer and a number of other interesting developments. I was also reporting on economic events at a time when we suddenly became allies of the Russians in a small manner - because the Russians were having just the same amount of trouble as we were getting information from the Egyptians. So I would troop around the Russian embassy once a month....

Q: You were saying Russian, but it was Soviet.

BROWN: Go around to the Soviet embassy once a month and talk to their aid counselor, and try to get figures about what they thought the economy was doing. It was an interesting period, because the embassy was active, and engaged in a lot of things, and Don Bergus (who was the interest section chief) was very much involved in trying to get the UN peace mission -the Jarring mission - up and running. He was the UN special representative for the Middle East. We had a very open dialogue with the Egyptian foreign ministry, and the palace. Bergus was being consulted because Nasser at that point realized he needed the United States to help him get out of the pickle that he'd gotten himself into. So we were playing a role. That was mainly Don Bergus - I mean, I was out of that because I was once again doing kind of routine work of the embassy, while he was doing the fancy political negotiation. But I kept enough in touch with it to be fascinated by what was going on.

Q: Did you feel a change in atmosphere?

BROWN: Definitely, not only because the Egyptian government was for once looking to us to be part of the solution to their problem. The Amer trial, which I alluded to a minute ago, was a reflection of the fact that the security services had collapsed, and as a result all of that intimidation of sources which existed before the '67 war disappeared by '68.

Q: What was the Amer trial?

BROWN: Marshal Amer was put on trial for treason, theoretically having plotted against the security of the state after the war: plotted to overthrow Nasser. It was never quite clear whether it was a frame-up, or what. But not only was Amer, who was one of the chosen successors of Nasser, but also the head of the Arab Socialist Union, the party that both were in, incriminated. I don't even recall what the results of the trial were, but Marshal Amer was dead. He died in the interim, but he was being tried in absentia, more or less. If I have my facts right, he probably was accused of attempting a coup, and he was probably convicted. The relevance isn't whether or not they were convicted, or whether the charges were relevant. The whole thing was that Nasser, having survived his resignation, was now trying to create a scare so that people would rally behind him again, and keep him in power, and that he would have a more solid power base. He was trying to eliminate potential rivals, and Amer had misled him about the preparedness of the Egyptian military before the '67 war. So he had guilt - at least in terms of his military responsibilities, which he had obviously not lived up to. The result of this was that, with the trial, and with the breaking down of the security services which took place as a result of the trial, and as a result of Nasser's breaking of all of the old controls, the Egyptians were much more ready to talk, and much more ready to hypothesize, and meet with foreigners. It was an interesting, exciting time.

Q: We were now able to make contacts, what sort of contacts?

BROWN: Well, you could literally talk to anyone in the bureaucracy at that point. The problem was you couldn't get good information; you never could. My responsibilities got more and more focused on helping and dealing with the American oil companies, which at that point were really beginning to develop good petroleum resources in Egypt. The Egyptian government needed the money, and therefore wanted us to feel good about the relationship. I spent a lot of time in liaison with the companies, which was more of a consular - almost - function, but an economic, AMCHAM, kind of opportunity. Our reporting actually got to be very sketchy, and almost a model for small embassy reporting - in a sense, it might be something that we could think of now that we're now in the process of shrinking embassies again. That is, we got the State Department to subscribe to the Economist Intelligence Report, and we subscribed to it, and we would comment on it informally in our cables. We'd say, "Yes, they've got this more or less right;...we don't have any statistics to prove it... but we think they're wrong here; they're right there..." We didn't do a lot of first person reporting. Charlie Marthinsen and I were the reporting section of the mission, and we had an awful lot of things to do like closing up USIS, the A.I.D. feeding programs, and things like that. So a lot of our work at that point was more in the care and feeding category, because there were a lot of big programs which had to be closed, collapsed, and new programs in the oil industry growing, all of which had to be kind of liaised with.

Q: One hears very little about American oil interests in Egypt. Where was this happening?

BROWN: AMOCO had discovered major oil...not major oil in terms of Saudi Arabian reserves... but major in terms of Egyptian requirements, and even enough to export. They discovered this down in the Gulf of Suez and were busy developing a multimillion dollar project which involved importing a lot of things. In the Egyptian economy, where imports of capital goods were very complicated and difficult to achieve, you were constantly fighting battles with the bureaucracy, helping AMOCO to bring its stuff in. Phillips was exploring in the Western Desert in the al Alamayn region. They discovered gas. Egypt is still an oil exporter, on a minor scale. They were also beginning negotiations for the Sumed pipeline, which is an oil pipeline which goes from the Suez to the Mediterranean, to bypass the Canal. So we were involved in that as well.

Q: Did you find much resentment about the so-called role of the United States in this war?

BROWN: Of course. The Egyptians to this day are probably still convinced that American planes flew, simply because myth is much more comfortable than reality. I think, by the time we left, they had accepted the fact that the Egyptian army had in fact been defeated by the Israeli army, but they still wanted to have another explanation that went beyond that. That there was a third party involved, or a fourth or fifth. So, yes - and this is part of the baggage, as I said earlier, you carry when you work in the Arab world - Arabs look upon any American as a direct or indirect supporter of Israel.

Q: Was there any curiosity with people you talked to about Israel?

BROWN: Growing, but still relatively minor. When we left Egypt in '69 we went out through Israel...went out through Jordan, I guess, I can't remember exactly how we did it, maybe the family didn't go. I know that I went to Tel Aviv in '69, when we left Cairo. I had some appointments up in Jerusalem with Israeli intelligence, and the foreign ministry, that were arranged for me by people in our embassy. I tried to tell them that the average Egyptian had...the lesson he had learned from the war was that Israel was there to stay. That Egypt was paying too high a price to be the champion of the Arabs. That they wanted out. And I said I thought the government felt the same way; it was looking for a deal. This was due to my secondhand watching of Don Bergus and the Jarring mission, and all those official negotiations. But my general reading of the situation was that. I remember trying to make this point to the Israelis, and they kept bringing up worse case scenarios - sort of saying, well you know, how can we be assured of what are you talking about? Where is your proof? And I just kept feeling that they were missing it very badly. My reading was that the average Egyptian wanted nothing more than to get out, and wanted the government to find a pretext, and do it. It took four more years, obviously, for Sadat to come up with that pretext, and it took another war, the Yom Kippur War, to do it.

Q: During this post-'67 war did you get any feel about the role of Nasser? Had that changed or not?

BROWN: Oh, yes. He was hanging in there. I think people had rallied around him because Egyptians are profoundly conservative people, and the idea of having lost a war and then getting rid of the only leader they'd known - by that time, 12 or 14 years - was hard for them to countenance, and they didn't want to discredit him at that level. They were prepared to accept almost any explanation for their loss other than that Nasser had made a mistake. So the Amer trial was a way to shift the responsibility, and the idea of Americans flying Israeli jets, or flying their own jets, was another way to shift responsibility. The average Egyptian was looking for a way to avoid pinning the responsibility on Nasser, although there was a lot of grumbling about it. But even though they weren't prepared to lay the responsibility at his door, they all knew that he was a dead force. That he was finished. It was just kind of unspoken, that the Nasser era was over.

Q: I guess you were so terribly busy that you probably didn't have much time to make contacts in the university and places like that.

BROWN: Frankly, I didn't spend much time at the university. It was pretty much the hot bed, with the radicals. If you were going to get in an irrational situation at that point, it'd be there at the university. Our instructions were to take a pretty low profile.

Q: The fact that you were working under the Spanish, did they play any role particularly outside of as a cover?

BROWN: They were a cover. The ambassador was a real gentleman though probably an unreconstructed fascist - I mean, this was in the Franco days, and his wife was even German. But they were very nice. They were good to us, and they allowed us essentially to run as if we were an independent mission. I think he tried for, but was happy not to succeed to have, signature authority. In the end, they signed our foreign office notes, without even translating them into Spanish. They were very good in terms of being responsive to what we needed, and staying out of our way.

Q: So you left there in...

BROWN: ...in the summer of '69.

Q: So the next time we'll pick it up what happened after you left Egypt.

-

Q: Today is the 3rd of January, 1997. After 1969 you're leaving Egypt and whither?

BROWN: We came back to Washington and spent a fairly long period in Washington: '69 to '73.

Q: Were you doing one or two jobs?

BROWN: My first job was in Egyptian affairs. I worked for Dick Parker in Egyptian affairs for two years. Joe Sisco was the Assistant Secretary of State at the time, and we were all busy. It was my first serious job in the Department. I remember what struck me more than anything else was how different the Department saw things from the way we'd seen things from the field, and how irrelevant some of the things were that we'd been doing in the field -in terms of reporting things that we thought were deathless. The field was totally ignored in Washington.

Q: Can you give some idea of what the concentration in the field would be as opposed to say the concentration in the Department regarding Egyptian affairs.(begin lots of noise on tape-not possible to transcribe.)

BROWN: This goes back to my experiences in Iraq as well. I think that, when you're overseas, you try desperately to understand the decision-making culture of the country you're in so you can predict decisions, and predict political events. And you spend a lot of time looking at really sociological and anthropological questions: How do people influence each other? What are the channels of influence? What other factors shape decisions on foreign policy? You write these in reports back to Washington, but they are read by only a couple analysts in INR and CIA. You never had time to read them! The operational people in the Department - all they care about is the decision, they don't care about how it got reached. So they wind up dealing with consequences, not causes, and our policy reactions often are not addressed to what motivates our adversaries.Long noise-gap on tape 2, side A

Q: During this '69 - '71 period this is brand new Nixon. William Rogers is the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger is sort of getting his feet wet in the National Security Council. Did you have any feel for a different attitude towards Egypt? We're talking about...Nasser is still in, but Nasser is not quite the same as he was. Was there the feeling back in Washington that the Soviets were calling the shots in Egypt as opposed to...did they see the Soviet role differently than you saw it?

BROWN: There were different levels in Washington. I think most of us in the Near East bureau bridled at the fact that Kissinger was focused on influencing the Middle East through dealing with the Soviets. We thought that the local parties had their own interests, and were more than capable of identifying those, and if we approached them directly we might affect their decision making process. There was a split between the desks, the NEA front office, and the seventh floor on that. But in the end Kissinger had his view, and he prevailed.

Q: Did you have any feel during this early times of the Nixon regime of how Secretary Rogers...you know, at one time one was given the impression Secretary Rogers could play with the Middle East while Kissinger dealt with the rest _____

BROWN: I was too naive, I think, really to understand what was going on most of the time. I know most of us were relatively frustrated by the fact that at least the peace process was more process than real, and that a lot of it was an effort to cut the Russians out of any action in the Middle East. A lot of it was being done purely to buy time. I remember being shocked at one point when I discovered that Joe Sisco's latest brilliant ploy, which he presented as a real effort to create movement towards a settlement - and, as an aside... (I think I was working as his staff aide for a temporary period)... and as an aside, he said, "That will buy us a couple more months." I suddenly realized we had different agendas in working the same thing. Rogers, yes, I think it was during this period that the famous Rogers Plan failed, and of course we were all hopeful and disappointed when it didn't succeed, but I don't think any of us were surprised.

Q: Was there any feeling of a certain amount of cynicism about...when I think about this there's the Johnson Plan, there was a Rogers Plan, there's the X Plan, here is the United States essentially trying to settle a tribal dispute of a very small bit of land, and both sides have a claim to it, and we have great pressure within the United States the Jews have more influence than Arabs. All of our involvement and effort in this over the decades go on. I'm trying to capture '69 to '71. Were you so engaged that you were engaged in this?

BROWN: You were engaged in what you were doing, and hopeful at the prospect of seeing a step that would be significant. As I say, I thought the time was right, at least for the Egyptians. I don't even remember most of the stuff that took place. In retrospect, it seems there was a continuous flurry of diplomatic activity designed to buy time or to freeze the Russians out.

Q: You say that buying time, what was the essential purpose of buying time for what?

BROWN: Buying time to keep people from killing each other, and avoid a major power confrontation as a result of it.

Q: Was there any contact between you and the Soviet desk on what the Soviets were trying to do?

BROWN: No, not really. You'll remember that in NEA you had the IAI desk, the Israel and Arab Affairs, and most of the peacekeeping in those days was centered there in terms of what the Soviets at that time were doing in Egypt. I had some contact when I was in Egypt, but not when I got back, no.

Q: What about the Israeli side. I mean, when you were with the desk, was there good communication with the people who were dealing with Israeli affairs?

BROWN: They worked next door. They were our professional colleagues in every way. They were probably, if anything, more cynical about the process than we were because they were a little closer to it, since they tended to be the people used by the front office to back up most of the peace process. Much of our activity on the Egyptian desk was bilateral things: dealing with visa problems, economic reporting, debt rescheduling and things like that. So we were, in a sense, kept out of the peace process. This was even before we had special negotiators. They were our colleagues, and many of them shared the same opinions. I mean, we didn't have any division of opinions. In the Bureau there was lots of discussion, but not that much argument about our basic aims and policies.

Q: Did you feel any affect of AIPAC, American-Israeli Political Action Committee or not?

BROWN: I'm not sure AIPAC even existed at that time. Of course, we were all aware of the Israeli lobby, and again the people who were most involved were the people on the IAI, Israel-Arab-Israel desk. The rest of us were to some degree shielded from it. But, obviously, when things came up about, let's say, debt rescheduling, there were opposing opinions about whether we should be bailing out Egyptians, made by people who didn't care for Egypt's political position. Obviously, the Israeli lobby was very strong there.

Q: Can you give a feel for how Dick Parker, his outlook on the situation during this time?

BROWN: Dick was an interesting boss to work for. I'd worked with him before both in Beirut and Cairo. He was both cynical and, occasionally, a bitter guy. I sensed that he kept it to himself in terms of content, but in terms of atmosphere, it was tough working for him sometimes because he was tense and frustrated. Sisco was an interesting study: a very effective Assistant Secretary, even though he didn't know much, or even care much, about the Middle East.(long noise on tape)

Q: In one interview described it, there used to be a cartoon of IBM and you'd have a sign saying "think". Instead above Sisco's there would be one "scheme".

BROWN: He'd say that quite regularly: "This is the way to achieve things, particularly in the Middle East." He was probably right. One thing he had, with his ethnic background, and coming from Chicago - he understood that things don't work in a linear or logical fashion with a lot of people in the Mediterranean world.

Q: When you were back in Washington did you see what were our interests?

BROWN: I don't think so. Egypt is a big enough, and an important enough country so that it's a key to any Arab-Israeli settlement. So, we weren't working under any illusions, either at the desk or overseas, that it could be ignored. I think we saw it pretty much the same, that it was necessary to get them to lay down their arms. If that happened, the rest of the Arab world might follow but at least the threat of a major confrontation would be reduced So Egypt was important, and the presumption was just about the same as it was from the field. Quite often in an embassy you think the country you're at is very important. But this time Washington agreed.

Q: Did you feel any pressure at the height of the protests about Vietnam? Did Vietnam play any role in what we were doing there? Did you feel any tremors?

BROWN: At the Kissinger level. But the tremors were so weak at my level, to be perfectly honest, that I didn't deal much with the issue. You know, of course, the Egyptians and others tried to put us on the defensive because of our experience in Vietnam, saying that we didn't have the credentials to be peace brokers elsewhere, etc., etc. (noise)

Q: How about the Egyptian embassy?

BROWN: Their ambassador at that time was Ashraf Ghorbal , who I think is really first rate. He was very effective, very good, but he was ill. He learned to get along with the Israelis to the extent he could. Our relations with the embassy were fairly warm. We were doing a lot of bilateral work, and we would see him fairly regularly.

Q: Did you have any feeling with the new Nixon administration that we were trying to either up-play or down-play our relationship with Egypt? Or it was pretty much all of a piece from what it had been prior to that?

BROWN: I didn't have any comparison to make on that. I'd been in Washington so little that I can't make a comparison. I certainly didn't have the impression that people were ignoring Egypt, or were trying to down-play one of the key players in a process that was important to Washington. Whether that process was being handled at the Secretary of State level, or the White House, may be irrelevant. It wasn't top priority, but close to it. This is one of the few places where we and the Soviets ran into each other, ran the risk of really colliding with each other.

Q: You left there in '71. In '71 to '73 you were doing something else?

BROWN: Yes, I had decided that I had to make a change if the new cone system was going to oblige us to specialize.

I think my experiences at that point indicated that they would automatically take area specialists and make them political officers. I looked around and decided, not only was I frustrated with political work, but that perhaps economic issues were really more interesting, and contained a potential for more early responsibility. So I decided that I should try to become an economic officer. I didn't have any economic credentials, but somehow or other I managed to con the Department to making me an economic officer. And either as part of that, or after that - I don't remember the sequence at this point - I moved from Egyptian affairs to the Office of Fuels and Energy in the Economic Bureau where I was the guy who watched the Middle East oil producers, and OPEC. That was the period immediately following the first oil crisis on 1990 (sic; 1973?), instigated by the Libyans, to put the squeeze on some of the independent oil companies.

Q: Occidental...

BROWN: Oxy was the vulnerable link that had been picked on, and after the Libyans got the revenue concessions they wanted, of course, then the other governments demanded the same. It was a competition between the Libyans on one side, and the Iranians on the other side, as to who would be the major price hawks. It was a very interesting time to work on energy, because we had a very serious effort to get the oil companies to work in conjunction. Jim Akins, who was the director of the office at the time, and other people, succeeded in getting an exemption for the oil companies to consult with each other - Exemption, that is, against anti-trust, so they could consult with each other and deal with these international situations as a group. So I was kind of note taker to a lot of meetings between our then Under Secretary, John Irwin, and the oil companies about strategies for negotiating with OPEC. A very interesting time. In retrospect, we probably did not do the right things, but we were convinced we were doing the right things at the time. The oil companies were determined to maintain their control over oil supplies, and wanted to negotiate in a group so they would not get picked off one by one as they had been in Libya. We spent a lot of time helping them, in fact, to maintain their...in retrospect, we were trying to help them maintain their dominant position. Because we were convinced that if any stability in the oil market existed at that time, it was thanks to the oil companies, and if it was destroyed, security of supply would be lost. We spent a fair amount of time at that point arguing with other people domestically about whether or not that was in our national interest. We were quite convinced that it was. In retrospect, oil market stability may even be greater now with the companies no longer in control, and with the producer governments owning the resource - quite often producing under contract, selling the oil on the spot market in large quantities, or under immediate term contracts.

Q: Wasn't the feeling at the time that if countries would automatically turn off and turn on oil according to political imperatives as opposed to the fact that they just plain wanted money.

BROWN: Well, they did it once successfully, as you'll remember, in '73. The Arab embargo was successful up to a point. But it wasn't successful enough so that they've ever tried it again. But we were afraid of that, and out of fear of it we tended at that point to try to support the oil companies and their position. In the end, the fear was greater than the reality.

Q: Obviously you were new to all of this, but what was your impression of the American oil companies?

BROWN: They were a very ingrown kind of cliquish crowd of people. We were dealing at a fairly interesting level, because some days we'd be meeting with the chairmen of the board, or the chief executive officers of these companies, and their counsel, and the rest of the week we'd be meeting with the Washington representatives. You know, you got the impression that they all had learned, and fed, and slept together for so long that they had this kind of single view of the outside world. They didn't have a single view, obviously, of their business prospects.

Q: What about some of the major oil producers from Washington your perspective, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Venezuela, Nigeria at that time.

BROWN: You know, the funny thing is we dealt less with embassies than we did with the oil companies in those days. We were really fixated on the OPEC oil negotiations in that job, and most of the embassies didn't have people who were really interested in energy diplomacy. There weren't many forums for energy diplomacy in those days: the IEA and other organizations had not sprung up, and diplomacy had really kind of left aside. That was a business to business kind of thing. The Arab embassies, and the Iranian embassy with which I dealt, didn't have any people who were interested or specialized in this. They were much more into traditional diplomacy. They left their state companies, or their oil ministries, to speak directly with the oil companies on issues which affected our office.

Q: What was the attitude within the fuels and energy...towards OPEC. Was this the enemy?

BROWN: That's an interesting question because I think there were trends within OPEC. The radicals within OPEC, like Tariki who was ex-Minister of Oil in Saudi Arabia and was considered the head of the radical wing of OPEC at that point, were pushing for nationalization in the oil industry; they were pushing for control over prices and supply, etc. We were not looking at OPEC as an enemy as an institution, but were looking for a way to control OPEC's behavior. I think, in our office, the hope was that you could sponsor, or help the moderates in OPEC to maintain their predominance over it. That in some ways meant working with the Iranians, who were at times moderate, but particularly with the Saudis, Minister Yamani at the time. OPEC as an organization was not as strong at that point as it became after the '73 oil embargo, and we thought we could deal with individual members rather than the organization - which we saw as relatively weak.

Q: What about Jim Akins as a major figure as the energy oil expert at the time. Oil was on everybody's mind because gas was short, this was the juggler vein of the American public.

BROWN: The ironic thing was that Jim was had moved on; he left sometime in '72 or early '73, I can't recall. So when the event that he had been talking about for years - the politically inspired Arab cut off of oil - finally occurred, he was no longer in Fuels and Energy. He had, I think, gone over to the White House, where he had more policy input but less operational involvement. But Jim - you're right - had a very important role, in the sense that it was he who predicted, or saw, this politically manipulated oil crisis. He probably did a little bit himself to make it possible by his preaching, and a lot of people criticized him, saying that by pointing out to the Arabs the fact that they had a weapon, had made it inevitable that they would try to use it.

Q: I heard this. He was accused of being the person who gave them the idea.

BROWN: I don't think he had _____

Q: How did he operate?

BROWN: Jim was a very interesting operator. He saw things in black or white, and tended to dramatize. But, in retrospect, I think we all stretched the truth fairly often, not overly generously. There were other people who were even more extreme than we, in their arguments.

We were overselling the potential for a producer cutoff for political or economic reasons. We were tending to dismiss the argument of those people who said if prices go up, demand will adjust as will supply over the long run.

Q: I'm no economist, but one of the terms I've heard in these interviews is, I think I know what the term means but, after all oil is fungible, and once it's out, it no longer has a nationality.

BROWN: That's what the Arabs learned in '73, when they tried to put an embargo on oil and tried to cut off certain countries, but they couldn't cut it off effectively. You try to squeeze in one place and it expands in another. The oil market takes care of shortages by price rationing. Unless you set up an elaborate worldwide administrative system to control oil movements, you can't possibly cut off individual countries successfully for very long. So the political use of oil, the Arabs found out, isn't effective over a long period. The other aspect of helping assure a free flow of oil is, simply, that any one supplier can't control the market either. In time other producers will fill the gap, or there will be virtual rationing as buyers back out of the market because they don't like the price anymore. The new structure in the oil market, where there are lots and lots of suppliers and buyers, and a wide measure of choice on the part of the purchasers, is probably a better guarantee of security and supply than anything else. Supplies do reach customers.

Q: As you were working with Jim in this office, what was considered the trigger that might cause an oil embargo?

BROWN: For Jim, and myself, who were the two Middle Eastern hands in that office, it was very clear: a political crisis in the area. It turned out to be the point at which the oil embargo was attempted, as a political weapon in '73 at the time of the Yom Kippur war.

Q: This would be October '73. I take you had left the office.

BROWN: By that time I had gone. I wound up in a very interesting position, as a result of having been the training officer with the Fuels and Energy office. A friend of mine from European Bureau wanted me to help them place one of their European hands in the embassy in Paris, to be the energy officer. I did a little maneuvering myself, and eventually got that job on the argument that I spoke French, and I knew energy, and therefore was the best candidate. It was a newly established position. It was one of the first energy offices which we'd established in an energy importing country.

Q: In '76, what was the title of your position?

BROWN: I guess I was just economic officer in the General Economic Policy section. I didn't have a title like energy attaché^{1/2} or anything like that, but in fact that's what I was. And because that crisis - the '73 war, the Arab oil cut off, the differences we had with the French over how to deal with the Arabs as a result of that, which led to the first of the north-south conferences, etc. - I had interesting work in all of the three years I was there. A super job, and a pleasant embassy to work in.

Q: When did you arrive in Paris?

BROWN: It must have been late August 1973.

Q: The October war of 73.

BROWN: Well, it was a big surprise to everybody.

Q: What was your reaction?

BROWN: I guess my first reaction was that we were not going to sit still too much longer with respect to the Middle East. If you'll recall, in that respect, the war was started by Sadat in an effort to break the log jam in the negotiations and get down to some serious discussion with Israel about the state of their relationship. It succeeded in the end in doing that. A little bit of quick catch-up in policy on our part was very helpful. But the reason was that Sadat did not launch that war in order to defeat Israel. He launched that war in order to change the diplomatic situation. So I felt some vindication in that the Arabs had called an oil embargo - and here I saw what I'd just been working on for the last couple of years coming to reality - a selective oil embargo against certain states. There was going to be an Arab political leverage of the most massive kind, and the Saudis were going to join in it willy-nilly. Everything we'd been arguing about was taking place but we hadn't achieved anything because most of our arguments over the years had been listened to, but not acted on. There was nothing in place to deal with this situation. So the discussion for the next couple of years was obviously going to be: how do we deal with it, what do we do structurally to change the dialogue over oil and energy. That was fascinating. The north-south dialogue, the beginning of the formation of the International Energy Agency, started off being run out of the embassy, and started off being my portfolio. Eventually the north-south dialogue moved over to the US mission to the OECD, but I was still very much a part of the whole process, the delegations which came and went, and the meetings which took place in the first north-south conferences in Paris.

Q: Can you talk about your perspective of what the French were doing at this time, and what relations between the United States as you were seeing them over this oil embargo?

BROWN: Well, the French, of course, had always resented the fact that they were the junior members of the oil community. They had their two oil companies in ELF/ERAP and CFP; they held positions in the Iranian consortium, and had minor positions in the Gulf countries. But they had more or less been squeezed out of Saudi Arabia - and out of resentment over what they considered to be an Anglo-Saxon lock on the major oil resources in the Middle East - had actively cultivated the Iraqis over the years, and particularly the years leading up to the '73 war, in an effort to get their own assured sources of supply through preferential deals. And that was their approach. Their approach was that they could, by political maneuvering and active pro-Arab bilateral relations, assure their own security and supply on an individual basis. Our position, the State Department position, and eventually the US government position, was that common measures on the part of the oil consuming countries were necessary to meet the threat of division, and counter the leverage from OPEC - that we should combine our efforts. And the French, as you know, consistently fought the formation of the International Energy Agency. They joined hands with the Arabs to produce a different kind of a dialogue - a political dialogue over the terms of trade over natural resources and money - which became the North-South Dialogue. So their approach was totally different, which, I suppose, was facilitated by the fact that the then French Foreign Minister, Michel Jobert, and Henry Kissinger had a very instinctive dislike of each other on a personal level, as well as on the political level. So the relationships between the two governments got fairly icy at times during this debate over oil and energy policy, and response to the Arabs.

Q: Was the attitude from the embassy, I mean from what you were getting, was it that the French were doing this as a matter of survival, but was this also a matter of sticking it to the Americans.

BROWN: Well, there's that element in anything that the French do. I mean, there's the Gaullist desire to be independent of the Americans just because they don't like to be led around by the Anglo-Saxons, and particularly the TransAtlantic Anglo-Saxons. They also have a more positive philosophy behind it, and that is that they would go their own way, so as to avoid being identified with a strong Israeli lobby - that is, that they can cut their own deals in the Middle East much better if they go an independent way than if they tried to cooperate with us.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the French Foreign Ministry at all?

BROWN: Oh, yes. I was over across the river, the Quai d'Orsay, twice a week at least, with the French oil companies once a week, with the Ministry of Industry twice a week. The French ministries have a close relationship with their commercial sector, and the French Ministry of Industry was the ministry supervising the petroleum and gas industry - in fact they set policy for the French energy industry, so they were the key for administering price and import policy, purchasing, etc. I had to keep in touch with them as well as the Quai d'Orsay, the Presidency, and the oil companies quite regularly.

Q: What was your impression of the French that you dealt with at both the Foreign Ministry and elsewhere?

BROWN: Well, they're very professional. These people are all trained in professional schools, the upper level bureaucrats, and the ones I was dealing with were quite often infinitely better versed on their portfolio than I was. I was learning, as I was there, about how they administered their companies, how they administered their foreign policy, how they manipulated oil contracts, how they achieved preferential deals in the Middle East. These are all things which they did within their bureaucracy, with a non-prying press, and with a great deal of old buddy relationships between themselves in the various ministries, and the senior members of the companies. So that they were able to do things in a closed circle which I kept trying to butt in on. I found them to be exceptionally good, exceptionally difficult to get information out of, and they defended their interests extremely well. It was very frustrating because they were doing things that we were clearly not in favor of, but they weren't exactly telling us what they were doing, and the French press does not search very hard to find information which is embarrassing to the French government.

Q: Was the Libyan connection relationship, was that important at this period?

BROWN: You know, I don't have much recollection of whether or not the Libyans were a significant factor. The Libyans were a minor supplier relative to the Middle East. So the French were really playing footsie with the Iraqis and other people in the Middle East, the Iranians and others, in an effort to ensure their supplies. Libyan oil was going at that point mainly to Italy if I'm not mistaken, and the Italians were the people who were playing footsie with the Libyans more than the French. Probably some of it was going to Marseille as well.

Q: Did you see much cooperation between Germany, the UK, maybe Benelux countries, and the United States of policy.

BROWN: The Germans, of course - when Kissinger and the United States proposed consumer solidarity against the oil producers - were much more inclined to come along with us, because they didn't have any significant oil companies of their own to protect their interests, and (unlike the French), they saw that they were likely to be victims of a world market shortage, so they were inclined to go along. The British were inclined to go along because, yes, their companies - whether or not they saw things commercially the same as our companies - saw things geopolitically pretty much the same way we did. So it probably heightened the French - with Dutch Shell in the same boat - French suspicions about the cabal of northern Europeans were heightened. Frankly, their determination to go it alone was heightened by virtue of the fact they saw these other people not necessarily colluding with each other, but acting in parallel out of their own interests.

Q: Did Soviet oil finally roll at this time?

BROWN: The Soviets didn't have much oil to put on the world market. They were selling largely to Eastern Europe and they were trying to get more oil to put on the world market. They had, I think, at that point gas to put on the world market. There was hope, I think, that the Soviets would increase supply to meet shortfalls in Western Europe, but I don't recall that was a major factor in what was discussed in Paris, nor did we ever get much from them as I recall.

Q: Who was your ambassador at the time?

BROWN: The first one was John Irwin, of the IBM family, and the second one was from Dow Chemicals, Kenneth Rush-two political ambassadors, anyway.

Q: Did they engage much in this?

BROWN: They both did to a certain degree, but they left it as largely a professional thing. They wanted to be informed; they obviously had to deal with French dissatisfaction about our policies at the level of the Presidency, so they had to be informed. And they had to know the line; they had to go in periodically and argue with the French. They were not really driving this very hard. It became fairly rapidly a dialogue which was carried out at the staff level by people like me, and at the professional level by Assistant Secretaries talking with each other on the TransAtlantic phone. My boss at that point, the Economic Counselor Chris Petrow, wound up leaving the Foreign Service after he left Paris because he had been undercut so many times by Washington's direct contacts with ministries in Paris; he felt embassies in Western Europe were beginning to lose their role when they could be cut out of significant communications between Assistant Secretaries or Deputy Assistant Secretaries in Washington, and their counterparts in capitals. Those people were seeing each other at international meetings; they developed personal relationships with each other; they had each other's telephone numbers, and the time difference wasn't so substantial that they couldn't phone each other every day, or once a week or something like that. It happened at my level sometimes, but at Petrow's level more often. He would go into a ministry with some instruction from Washington and he'd say, "Please help us do this, or let's do that," and they would say, "But Chris, you don't understand; I was talking to your boss last night on the phone and the instructions have changed." The French were quite good in playing this against us. They quite often knew more what was going on in Washington than we did.

Q: I think this was something in the luggage of every Foreign Service officer. We know our political masters, particularly after Vietnam the sort of general feeling we couldn't really trust our political masters to carry through on things. I mean, both for domestic, from Congress and all that. Any commitment that we might be pushing for as professionals doing this, sort of looking over our shoulder and wondering on our own, are they really going to be with us if this gets a bit tough.

BROWN: Yes, there's that. I have just been watching the hearings in which Secretary of Defense-designate Cohen was up on the Hill, testifying about our position and our ability not to stay in Bosnia, to put it mildly - here is the case of an administration which, to a certain degree, changes its commitment depending upon the nature of the Secretary of Defense. That's part of it. I think, however, that knowing that you have government which is likely to change, or possibly will change every four years, makes you careful in making commitments which last beyond four years. In a way, it focuses your thinking. You have to make commitments only where you have a real interest. In a way that's good discipline, because you know that if you've made a commitment to a country, then there's a real American interest in keeping that country safe and secure. And I think even the kind of commitments we've made to Saudi Arabia over the years are the kind of commitments that will hold up, administration to administration. You sharpen your thinking. Of course, having said that, the commitment may or may not be equally applicable in all political conditions, and there is a tendency in Washington for domestic lobbies and other political things to drive our ability to deliver at any given time. So if you don't have a written commitment, it's weaker.

Q: Were there any major events in this '84 to '86 period in your area?

BROWN: No, no it was process management.

Q: This is just a little before all hell broke loose.

BROWN: No. By process management, I mean that the (Iran-Iraq)war went on in the north; we tried to sell arms to the Saudis; we had small problems here and there. I believe the North Yemeni and the South Yemeni had a scrap; the Qataris and the Bahrainis had a scrap, but all of them were small matters, none of them major political issues.

Q: What was the problem between Qatar and Bahrain?

BROWN: Oh, it's a long-standing border dispute having to do with the ownership of a bunch of reefs, and islands between the two. There's likely to be oil in the area so they fight like cats over something that doesn't look worth fighting over.

Q: I take it during this time that you never felt that the Secretary of State, George Shultz, was turning his attention to the Persian Gulf?

BROWN: Of course, George Shultz had worked for Bechtel, which does a lot of work in the Persian Gulf, so we knew he was aware of it - but in terms of his day to day attention, no. We couldn't even get the attention of Dick Murphy, to be perfectly honest, our Assistant Secretary. I think on three or four separate occasions I tried to get Murphy to go to the Gulf, and he kept promising to do it, and he never did. I'm amused that now that he's in the Council on Foreign Relations, in New York, he goes to the Gulf quite regularly to collect money.

Q: Well, Gordon, in 1986 you left NEA, whither?

BROWN: To be DCM at the embassy in Tunis: a very nice job, and a very nice country, an interesting time. We were there for three years...

Q: ...from '86 to '89.

BROWN: The first year was relatively quiet. I was charged $\frac{1}{2}$ part of the year because the previous ambassador left a bit early. It was interesting to be charged $\frac{1}{2}$ - the first time I'd had that kind of responsibility in a post overseas. In fact, it was rather odd. If you'll remember, my previous posting overseas had been as a junior member of the economic section in Jeddah, and I had left that post angry at the lack of responsibilities that I had. I went from that position several years later to number two in an embassy without ever having been a chief of section, without ever having written an efficiency report on anybody other than a secretary, without ever having had any management experience whatsoever - as I thought, a little bit of a bad mark for the career promotion system in the Department that this kind of thing had happened. I happen to like management issues and I felt that running the day to day activities of an embassy like Tunis was just about what I wanted. Several different agencies were involved, lots of coordination, and the DCM, as you know, is important to the extent that he keeps things off the ambassador's desk. I enjoyed that.

Q: What was the situation in '86 when you arrived in Tunisia?

BROWN: The Tunisians were still smarting over the Israeli raid on the Palestinians -the PLO had quarters across the bay from Tunis - and that colored our relations, because no matter how much we objected, the Tunisians still felt that we had somehow or other had a hand in that raid. Our relations otherwise were pretty good. We had a defense relationship with Tunisia which was maintained by certain sponsors or benefactors of Tunisia in the Congress who always earmarked aid to Tunisia military programs. We had a decent relationship with the government, as the Prime Minister who had created a lot of troubles in our bilateral relationship, Mr. Mzali, had gone. My first year there, Bourguiba was still around, the relationship was pretty good. Sometime in the second year Bourguiba was replaced by Ben Ali, his Minister of Interior and then Prime Minister, and that brought in a new and rather interesting phase as we tried to figure out whether Ben Ali was going to make changes in the political line, and whether or not he was going to open up the country to a more democratic form of...

Q: It's a one party state?

BROWN: It is a one party state. Though it was an interesting second year, nothing much changed in the end, although the head of state had changed. But all the Tunisian tendencies towards centralism and conformity came into play, and eventually the one party state survived - just under a slightly different format: nominally pluralist, but not many votes for the other parties. Our relationship with Ben Ali continued (to be good), since he was obviously a national security and defense type. He maintained the defense relationship, and our political relationship was still pretty strong. And, of course, the third year I was there was interesting because that was the year in which we opened the dialogue with the PLO in Tunisia. And although I was not the negotiator - that was the ambassador - I was the guy who kind of helped bring it together on the administrative side. I was the guy who had to negotiate with the PLO about the form of the conference, and arrangements, and where the flags were, and all those things that only make news when they are screwed up. It was an interesting time. Bob Pelletreau, my ambassador, was getting his instructions straight from Washington on the phone, and he shared them with me to the degree he could, but he and our political counselor, Edmund Hull, were really doing the substance of that negotiation while I was running the embassy.

Q: How did Pelletreau operate as an ambassador?

BROWN: He's a very private person, and he does not communicate very well, which is a shame because he always has a lot to say when you can drag it out of him. He's extraordinarily competent. He knows his material and has a retentive mind, and can bring up anything he wants to in the way of information. But as the DCM it was a little awkward at times because I didn't really know where he was on certain things unless I walked into his room and demanded that he tell me. But he let me run the embassy. I mean I was very happy, in fact, that the PLO dialogue came up - because he had let me run the embassy during our first year together, but he was beginning to get a bit antsy in that situation. Tunis is not a very busy place, and Pelletreau is a very competent fellow, and I could get the impression that he was beginning to pull back some of the cards he had given to me, or dealt to me, in the first year. Then the PLO thing came up, and he had his hands full on that, and I was able to continue as sort of the executive officer of the embassy, which is a role I appreciated and enjoyed.

Q: What was the feeling, you're a Middle East hand, and all of a sudden we're talking to the PLO which had been forbidden by Congress, I guess, it's almost engraved in stone. What was the feeling about this?

BROWN: Well, I suppose the feeling was, on a practical level, a certain amount of pleasure because we had always thought that ultimately some dialogue with the PLO was necessary in order to have any kind of a peace settlement in the Middle East - you couldn't ignore them. The second feeling was one of fear, that you really had to walk on eggs on this one. The ambassador was extremely exposed. One misstep and the whole thing could be off, so it was a very tightly controlled - as you can imagine - kind of scenario that we walked. Very, very closely controlled from Washington, and very, very choreographed at every step.

Q: Did you find as part of this that you were having to make sure that the embassy staff didn't chat away too much with anybody, newspaper people or anybody else like that.

BROWN: It wasn't that much of a problem. But Pelletreau certainly made it clear that this was his negotiation, nobody else was empowered to speak for the government about it, or on it, and that the other people had better keep their mouths shut at diplomatic receptions, etc. And we did, and there weren't any loose cannons in our embassy, so we didn't have that problem. And then, of course, the information -as I suggested earlier - was so tightly controlled that they didn't have much to talk about anyway.

Q: During this period how were relations, as we saw them, between Tunisia and Egypt?

BROWN: If I remember, they were strained, and I can't remember about what to be perfectly honest. It wasn't a serious problem. One of the causes of strain was, I think, that the Egyptians were trying to get the Arab League back during that period, and the Tunisians were the seat of the Arab League, had been since the '67 war, the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League, or the freezing.

Q: No, this would be Camp David, wasn't it?

BROWN: Camp David, yes, '79. Right, not the '67 war. '79, whenever Camp David was.

Q: Camp David is when Sadat went to Israel, we're talking about '76-'77. Camp David was during the Carter administration, relatively early on. Well, anyway, we're talking about '77-'78.

BROWN: Okay, when I was still in Riyadh. The Egyptians wanted to get the League back in Cairo. The Tunisians were resenting it, and didn't want the Egyptians to get it back. The Egyptians had a very good ambassador in Tunisia and the relationship was okay, but not awfully good.

Q: Having the Arab League there, was this considered something that meant anything by this time?

BROWN: It meant enough to make Tunisia a very interesting place because having the Arab League there, of course, was why the PLO was there - one of the reasons why the PLO was there. It also meant that the other embassies in Tunis had fairly high level, or good, people assigned. So Tunis was much more of a listening post, as a result of having the Arab League there, than it would have been without it. The Arab League, of course, did not really amount to terribly much. We from the embassy would occasionally go around and make a demarche at the Arab League, usually at my level, or at the counselor level. We didn't take it seriously enough to very often engage the ambassador. It was kind of pro forma to go around and scold the League for doing something that they had done wrong - that kind of stuff.

Q: What about Algeria?

BROWN: Ben Jedid was still in power in Algeria, and to be perfectly honest I think in Tunisia we were unaware of the degree to which his attempt at reform was a) corrupt; and b) unlikely to bear fruit. We were sort of cheering him on. He was talking in terms of democratization in Algeria, and bringing the FLN into the modern world. I don't think we in Tunis had a better appreciation than the embassy in Algiers did. The embassy in Algiers was essentially saying, let's see if he can do it. He may succeed. We weren't as pessimistic, or cynical, as perhaps we should have been in that respect.

Q: Well, Libya, I would imagine would be something looming out there all the time, wasn't it, as far as a problem.

BROWN: The Tunisians themselves had problems with Libya. There were camps within the Tunisian government as to whether their relationship with Libya should be one that was warmer than it was, or more covert. They danced, to some degree, according to our tune because we were military allies, and Tunisia couldn't afford to cold-cock us on that one. So occasionally Libya came up between us in the bilateral relationship, but most of the time the Tunisians went along with us and tried to isolate Libya, and keep it as a low level and festering sore, I suppose, on their border. They had their own problems with the Libyans, and there was a very long fight by the people in the south of Tunisia to expand - particularly economic - relations with Libya, because their economy in the south of Tunisia actually was traditionally more directed towards Libya than it was towards Europe. So it was an interesting situation, but the government stayed fairly firmly in the anti-Libyan camp, even though Ben Ali himself was rather friendly, I think, to some of the Libyan leaders.

Q: What was the view of Qadhafi at that time from the embassy?

BROWN: A man of terrorism, creator of trouble, monster nuisance, had to be isolated, and we tried to enlist the Tunisians to help us on that. And, by and large, they cooperated.

Q: When did we bomb Qadhafi's headquarters? Was that during your time there?

BROWN: I believe that was when I was in Washington.

Q: How about dealing with the Tunisian government? How did you find dealing with them?

BROWN: I must admit that one of my first experiences in Tunisia colored my feeling about that, though it was probably much more atypical than otherwise. I had been in Tunis for about three or four days, and the ambassador said (sort of towards the end of the day), "Gordon, the Minister of Economy has just called, and he wants to discuss an issue with us. So why don't you come and join me?".. So we jumped in the car and went out to the Minister's house, which was situated on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean, overlooking, in fact, our ambassador's house - he had even a better location than our ambassador. We sat on his balcony and were served whiskey in large tumblers by his beautiful daughter, wearing something that would not pass muster downtown or in an Islamic setting. The Minister's first statement was, "We have a problem; let's see how we can solve it." After having served most recently in the Gulf where it's always, "We have a problem, what are you going to do about it", or "You have a problem, we're not going to help you with it," I was very struck by this. And that did pervade much of our relationship with the Tunisians - a cooperative relationship, particularly on the economic and defense side. They tried to discuss things in a relatively good and logical way. The Tunisians, of course, also had an ability to play games with us, and they did that quite regularly on the political side. Some of our relationships on the political side, Arab-Israeli issues, Libya, etc., were much more typical posturing and strained relationships. But you could pick up a phone to a Tunisian and do business over the phone; it was a change from the rest of the Arab world.

Q: What about the French? How did we see their role at that particular time.

BROWN: I don't think we had much concern about their role. They were interested in the stability of the southern Mediterranean, and they had the same interests we did. On the commercial and cultural side, they saw us as a very suspicious actor on the stage. I think the French embassy was always looking over our shoulder to see that we weren't trying to turn Tunisia into Anglophone, pro-American place, rather than an ex-French colony. They were very conscious of their cultural, economic and military ties there. They were afraid they were being undercut by us. So they were much more suspicious of us than we of they.

Q: When you arrived there was Bourguiba playing any role, or was he out of it?

BROWN: He would act officially a couple of hours a day, during which sometimes he made very interesting, and very good decisions. But then his health deteriorated so badly, and he was being manipulated by so many people in his palace guard, that you never really knew whether his decisions were good or not. And sometimes they didn't hold up.

Q: Is that what the political section was trying to do, figure out who was in control at any one particular point?

BROWN: I don't think we played court politics quite that much. What we tried to figure out was whether...Tunisia policies are fairly predictable, they're not that erratic. The man's behavior was erratic, so we tried to figure out, "Is this in keeping with their traditional policy?" We had good relations with the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior, the key ministers, and so unless there was something on which we really needed to go to Bourguiba, we dealt with the Prime Minister and the others.

Q: Was oil much of a factor in Tunisia?

BROWN: Well, American oil companies were coming in. Oil was being discovered. It was an interesting time for the American oil companies. I think Conoco had discovered oil, and yes, it was a factor, - because oil companies were seen by some Tunisians as potential saviors of the economy, with oil earnings.

Q: What about commercial work?

BROWN: We had a pretty serious effort in expanding the American commercial presence in Tunisia, but we ran into a lot of structural problems. Most American companies didn't see the Tunisian market as being sufficiently interesting to set up separate distributorships, or anything like that. They tended to work out of their distributorships in Paris, which always meant a 30% markup on the price. So we weren't always competitive, and we tried to break that down as much as we could. But by and large, in spite of a pretty extensive effort, and I think a good effort, we were only marginally successful commercially. The French were still the commercial kings of the block.

Q: Then you left there in '89?

BROWN: Right.

Q: And whither?

BROWN: Directly to Tampa to be the Political Advisor to the Central Commander, who was General Schwarzkopf.

Q: You were there from '89 to '91. Sort of an interesting time. When you were assigned to Central Command, what was the general feeling at that time? Was this sort of a minor little place? How did you feel about it?

BROWN: I went to Central Command...to admit it, I went to Central Command after another assignment had fallen through. I had not bid on the job because I wasn't entirely sure I wanted it, but kept it in mind, and kept it kind of in the back drawer, if you will. General Schwarzkopf's prime consideration in filling the job had been that he wanted somebody who was not about to retire, but somebody who was still on the way up. So when he heard I was available, and had just been turned down for an embassy, he took me on, and I was pleased to be there. To answer your question more directly, it doesn't mean that it was considered a plum job. It wasn't a plum job because the Central Command, although very much a part of our presence and projection of our interests in the Middle East, was still considered at that time to be somewhat of a cockpit full of gunslingers who wanted to come in and disturb our bilateral relationships with these countries in the Gulf. And it was always pushing, pushing, pushing to get a little bit more access, a little bit more visibility in the Gulf, and was seen as trouble by many people in the State Department. So getting assigned to the Central Command meant that you were always going to be rubbing people up to get things they didn't necessarily want you to have. So it promised to be an interesting assignment, and in fact it was in many ways, although I must admit that after a year... A lot of what the political advisor does is to keep the commanding general and his other six or eight key staff members, apprized of what's going on: the politics, how it works, whether or not some of the things they're proposing make sense from a political point of view (in terms of local politics), etc. So you serve as an advisor on that score. The other thing you do, is you travel with the General when he's going out to the Middle East, or East Africa, or South Asia, the three areas in which he had command responsibility. And you are kind of his note taker, protocol officer, etc., in meetings with chiefs of state, ministers of defense and so on. That was an interesting thing to do for a year, but after a year it got pretty tiresome fast, because they were long and tedious trips. Schwarzkopf is a difficult guy to travel with. At the end of the year I was beginning to say, Oh Lord, the next year is going to be more of the same; it's going to be tiresome. But then the Gulf War happened and it was certainly different the second year.

Q: Before we move to the Gulf War, could you describe in '89 what the Central Command involved, and what were its concerns?

BROWN: The Central Command was set up after the Iranian revolution, as I mentioned earlier, to give us a military capability in the area - which covered Pakistan and Afghanistan in the east, to Egypt in the west, plus the littoral of the Red Sea down to Somalia - and Kenya was also in the area. That meant the shipping lanes, really, the Persian Gulf and the shipping lanes up through the Red Sea: the oil producing areas and the shipping lanes around them were in the area of command. And the problem for the Central Command was that none of the countries in the area would accept a forward presence on the part of the Central Command. It was supposed to be able to project force in this area and yet it had no bases; it had no facilities. Some countries like Egypt had built up the tradition of allowing us to come in once a year on exercises, and we would have relatively strong planning exercises during the year, then once a year we'd come in for major military exercise. But in the other areas we had even less than that. We had, sometimes, the ability to deal with the local governments, even to plan a little bit in the way of conducting joint exercises, small exercises, nothing on a major scale. What the Command did have, of course, was the fact that the Saudis for years had been in an unspoken defense relationship with us - about which we were talking earlier. And, as part of that, they had sought our advice when they built their own defense infrastructure. So they had airbases, and ports, and roads, and communications and things like that which were designed to be available to influxes of troops from overseas, when and if requested. But there was no legal or other framework for that request. It was simply that they had built these with the intent that they might be used some day by our troops, but we had no status of forces agreement. We had no arrangements to bring people in or anything. So the entire objective of CENCOM was to get more on the ground presence. The only place where we had any on the ground presence of a permanent nature was in Bahrain, and that was about 20 people.

Q: Traditionally, I know I was there in the '50s, Bahrain had COMIDEASTFOR. That was with a seaplane tender at that time, but it was Navy. The CENTCOM establishment, when was that brought in?

BROWN: I'll try to remember, possibly it was while I was in Tunisia. The arrangement was really not much different from COMIDEASTFOR. In fact, what it boiled down to was that CENTCOM was given authority by the Bahrainians to have a forward element of its command in Bahrain - that meant that somebody was designated as the forward commander, and was allowed to have a staff of three or four or five, or something like that. Well, in a military sense a staff of four is a sergeant's staff; it isn't a general's staff. So they never set up the command in Bahrain, but the nucleus was there, and there was an unfilled position. Actually the position was filled, but the person was physically present in Tampa. But at any point he could deploy to Bahrain, and say, "Here I am, I'm the forward element commander of Central Command." But, in fact, as I say, he was never there, and it was the commander of the Middle East force who was really the CENTCOM presence.

Q: When you got there in '89, what was the structure, and where were you looking. Were you looking at what going to be problem? How were problems seen?

BROWN: That was Schwarzkopf's great contribution before the war. Schwarzkopf had come to the command a year before I was there, so he had already been doing this for a year, and had realized, I think, quite early on that Central Command's mission - to defend Iran against a Russian invasion - no longer made any sense in the conditions of post-Iranian revolution. Iran had not asked us to defend it, and the Russians would not be invading. So, possibly as much as anything for political reasons, (that is in order to gain support within the Defense Department, and Congress for his budget), he looked for a new rationale for Central Command and found it in the volatile nature of the region. He simply said, "Look, this is an area that can explode at any time. There are a bunch of bad actors here. The Yemenis could do something that would be stupid and close shipping through the Red Sea. The Sudanese could do something in Egypt which would close the Suez Canal. There could be new rules at any time. The Iraqis are always a wild card because they're big, strong, and arbitrarily directed. So we have to be prepared for any kind of military contingency in this area, not necessarily of a major invasion by a non-area power." So, he began building a military rationale for taking care of brush fires, major brush fires, in the areawhich led one to start planning against Iraq, because that was the major military power in the area that had some capability.

Q: They had just basically defeated the Iranians.

BROWN: Yes, I guess so. The war was over in '88. The Iraqi-Iran war sort of petered out in '88, and Iraq was definitely a wild card in terms of its political behavior. And Saudi Arabia was clearly the equity which we wanted to protect.

Q: Where did Kuwait fit into all of this at that time?

BROWN: Kuwait was linked to defending Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was a key preoccupation and the relationship had warmed up considerably from the one I described earlier, because of our flagging the tankers etc. Our relationship with Kuwait was still politically relatively distant, although the military relationship warmed up quite a bit; Schwarzkopf had schmoozed successfully with the Kuwaiti command.

Q: Could we talk about your initial impression that you were getting of General Norman Schwarzkopf and how he saw the area from your perspective, how he used you, and also his staff. This is before all hell broke loose.

BROWN: Schwarzkopf was a guy who had a very retentive memory and was very interested in the politics of the area. It may be unusual for a general, but he was far more interested in local politics than most of the rest of his staff, and he had to almost tell them that they should be interested. They were interested in getting things done - I mean, one thing we don't quite appreciate in the State Department is the degree to which Defense people are objective-driven. I mean, give them an objective and they will run over their mother to reach it if they want to make a star, or another star. Their objective was to get access to facilities in the Persian Gulf, and some of them were prepared to charge directly at their target. And Schwarzkopf was always the guy in the command who would say, "Whoa. This is a political arena working in; it's not engineering, this is politics." So Schwarzkopf was an interesting guy to work with from the beginning, because he understood, tried to understand, and I think did a pretty damn good job of understanding, the politics. He knew that politics in that part of the world were personality driven. He schmoozed, as I suggested, with anybody he could find. He tried to develop personal relationships with Ministers of Defense, and their advisors, the emirs and leaders of the countries where he was going. He was quite effective. He's got a very very good personality for making political connections. He's a big, bluff, warm guy when he wants to be, who can turn on the charm and do a pretty good job. He was clearly working under the assumption that he had to charm these people into giving him some help; that his generals could apply the muscle and he would apply the grease. It worked pretty well.

My job was to help him understand the political intricacies of the area... who was whose cousin, and whom you could stiff and whom you couldn't, whose invitation you had to accept, when the right time to act was... those kinds of things. He was already aware of the political importance of what he was doing and was very anxious to do it right. My secondary job, which I enjoyed almost more, was to educate his staff. The other generals who worked in that team with me - there were ten of us or so who were sort of the inner team - my job, I thought, was to educate some of those people. They had never ever heard of the Middle East until they got this assignment. For them, too, sometimes it wasn't a plum assignment, they just happened to be assigned there. They didn't know anything about the Middle East, and I thought it was my job to help them. I enjoyed that and I think that was quite fruitful, because quite often you can get these guys who at first were inclined to go direct at their target to discover that, in the Middle East, it's quite often easier to outflank your target.

Q: How did you go about educating.

BROWN: When somebody said something crazy in staff meeting, I'd go around to them afterwards and say, maybe you and I should sit down and have a talk about the background, etc. I kind of went to people's offices and tried to make myself useful. In fact, I think my reputation became that I was the guy that people went to for what they called a "sanity check". When they were developing plans or operations, they would come tripping around to the POLAD and say, "Hey Gordon, we've got a problem we want to discuss. We're thinking of doing this, does it make sense?" You could say yes; no; change it; approach it this way. You tried to give the political context, and if they trusted your judgment - which was basically all you had to sell - they would come to you. So the idea was to get them to buy onto the little decisions, so they would eventually buy onto the big ones.

Q: What kind of support were you getting from the State Department?

BROWN: What I got, basically, they didn't give. I had to go fetch it. I would go up to Washington fairly regularly. I'd come up to talk to people on the desks and on the Hill, and the other departments. I was on the phone whenever I could be. And what I was trading in was information on both sides: "We in CENTCOM are thinking of this, what would be your reaction?" So I could serve as an early warning system to the people in CENTCOM if they were going to push on something that was not feasible, that wasn't going to get very far. I could give them an early warning that it wasn't going to go; that they were going to have political problems.

Q: As you know I have done a series of interviews with Chas Freeman who was our ambassador at this time to Saudi Arabia, and he was saying that in Washington, in both the Middle East bureau and up to the Secretary, that the concentration was on the breakup of the Soviet Union, and any interest in the Middle East was centered strictly on Israel, Lebanon, and that.

BROWN: I wouldn't disagree.

Q: Did you find that in some ways you were working in a policy vacuum?

BROWN: No. I think policy was supportive of what we were trying to do. But you didn't get bureaucratic support. What you got was: Go ahead and do it, but don't break any eggs - and we won't tell you, you have to figure out yourself when you're going break the eggs. Schwarzkopf's relationships with the front office in the Near East Bureau were not all that good. They just didn't work. It was one of the few times I have seen which Schwarzkopf had not made a helpful impression on his counterpart. I was seen around the Near East division as a kind of trouble-maker, because I always came up with something that I wanted to sell to them, that they should be helping us do. In some areas of the Near East Bureau that help was more essential than in others. My old country directorate thought it was part of their day's work. But when I went to other people and said, We've got a problem; can you help us with it?, they tended to be a little bit less concerned, and it wasn't on their front burner at all.

Q: John Kelly was the Assistant Secretary, and his interest was not very strong.

BROWN: As I say, he and Schwarzkopf failed to make a connection. I think Kelly thought CENTCOM wasn't really part of his...

Q: Its interesting if the two ever got together because they're both renowned for their tempers.

BROWN: I think to some degree that's why maybe they stayed at arm's length.

Q: The time before all things happened, did you ever become the object of Schwarzkopf's temper?

BROWN: He gets mad at everybody at some point or other. I remember occasions when we sat on a plane for 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 hours, suffering glacial relationships with each other. On most of these trips, General Schwarzkopf traveled with his staff aide and usually four or five other people of general rank- myself one of them - and when he was in a bad mood (and sometimes it was because of me that he was in a bad mood), none of us dared have any conversation because we all were sitting in this eight-seat executive section of that plane. He was a very difficult guy to deal with. Did he blow up at me? No. Did he get angry at me? Yes. Did he show his anger? Yes, by being snarly at me. He showed his anger to people on his staff quite often, sometimes because he was legitimately angry, at other times it was because he was a great believer in the fear of anger. I guess this incident was after we had gotten to Riyadh, but it could have been anytime: he slammed his fist on the table, and made everybody jump, and yelled and screamed and shouted. But as he was doing this (I can't remember the issue), he kind of looked at me-and I was sitting there with my hands folded across my chest, probably, and looking a little bit cynical. After the meeting he came up and said, "Gordon, I take it you didn't agree with my explosion there." I said, "Well, you may have overdone it a bit." And he said, "I got them to pay attention!" He wasn't at all angry, he was just doing it because that was the way he got people's attention.

Q: Did you get a feel for both Schwarzkopf and also the Central Command's position within the military hierarchy. Did you have the feeling that you were in a byway when the real action was elsewhere?

BROWN: Well, fortuitously we had actually run an exercise, I guess in late June of 1990, which was designed to check out whether or not the command, communications, and decision making systems were in place for an exercise in the Middle East. The scenario had been drawn up to clearly make the opponent Iraq. The end of the scenario was going to be deployment to Saudi Arabia. We had this exercise, which turned out to be very fortuitous, because after having ended the exercise we had worked through some of the command relationships, and also - to be perfectly honest - worked out some of the logistic relationships which later became very important for moving all of that equipment to Saudi Arabia. The problem while we ran the exercise was - typically - that the Near East Bureau in the State Department said, "Hey, you can't run an exercise against a friendly country. You can't identify Iraq as the enemy." And Iraq was nominally if not friendly, at least not hostile. So we developed an elaborate sham scenario which was that, sometime in the future, there would be an overthrow of the current regime in Iraq, and it would then become hostile and threaten to invade Saudi Arabia. This was the scenario which gave us a plausible grounds for denial if the Iraqis complained that we were exercising against them. That was the only major exercise which was conducted with Iraq as the potential opponent. But that wasn't bad for military planning. I mean, within a year and a half from coming to the command, Schwarzkopf had gotten a turnaround in the potential mission: instead of fighting the Soviets in Iran we would be fighting Iraq in the Middle East.

Q: How did you find our embassies, particularly our ambassadors in that area, from your perspective, were they at all helpful to you all developing what are we going to do. This is again before the war started, to help refocus, or not. Or were they not particularly plugged into this?

BROWN: No, I think things had changed quite a bit. Even when I was the Country Director in '84-'86, people had begun to realize that helping CENTCOM was part of their instructions. It wasn't always written up very strongly in their letter of instruction, but clearly they were graded in Washington on not creating troubles for CENTCOM: not trying to undercut what CENTCOM was doing. So ambassadors and other officers in the Gulf were, yes, quite helpful to CENTCOM. They weren't always 100% helpful. When we went out there they were 100% helpful, and it might slip back to 85% after we were no longer there, because they had other conflicting priorities. It came down to questions - quite often relatively petty ones - of what can a team come out to discuss: for example, the leasing of a new warehouse building so we can put fire fighting equipment in. And they would say, "Let the team come next summer, I'm too busy now." Small things like that. Ambassadors could get bad reputations in CENTCOM for posing any kind of problem. They clearly had other priorities, and sometimes they didn't pose other problems.

Q: Let's talk about the lead off up to the Gulf War. I'm interviewing more or less concurrently David Mack who was the deputy assistant secretary dealing with everything except Palestine. So I'd like to get your view here. Iraq was beginning-what was it, June or July, making noises towards Kuwait. Did that raise any particular warning bells with us?

BROWN: Yes, but....this has been written about it and it's an item...but I don't think we had any particular knowledge down at CENTCOM about what was going on. We were mainly receivers of information. Iraq was blustering. Iraq was broke. Iraq wanted people to bail it out, and was threatening the Kuwaitis, who were the nearest and richest people that they could threaten readily. And we saw this as not....basically, I think, our reaction was a little light: mine was certainly. I subscribed to the general theory at the time, and that was that the Arabs had periodic feuds, and periodic hysteria fits amongst each other, and even occasionally took up force (usually kind of symbolically) against each other, but that no Arab threatened the existence of the Arab state structure - which was as artificial for Iraq as it was for Kuwait. That once you started questioning the boundaries and the existence of the states, then anybody could question anything. We just assumed that if Iraq moved against Kuwait, it would move in a way to get whatever kind of blackmail it wanted out of Kuwait, and then retreat, or go back. I think in the Headquarters the betting was - Schwarzkopf was betting - that Iraq would invade but stop, occupy a little bit of the north of Kuwait, saying, "Watch it or we'll come the rest of the way if you don't give us what we want." And then there would be an Arab mediation and everybody would go home, and the Kuwaitis would be forced to pay. Because frankly most of us thought the Kuwaitis were behaving pretty stupidly. They were pretty arrogant.

Q: David Mack was saying you could always defeat intelligence estimates if you do something incredibly stupid. And that was the feeling that what Saddam Hussein did at that particular time.

BROWN: Well, he could have come off with it. He could have. I think (that his error was in) offending the entire Arab state system, as well as the international community: not only by invading, but by then trumpeting that this was for all time, and it wasn't just a question of settling the current dispute, but settlement of Kuwait's hash, period. The minute he tried to replace the Kuwaiti ruler by force and put in a puppet regime, he changed the formula.

Q: Really, up to things moving there was some requests I think slightly before anything happened on the part of the United Arab Emirates to have some refueling capability. Did that fall within your bailiwick?

BROWN: Yes, indeed it did, and that was kind of fun because it put us in direct conflict with the Department of State. The UAE has a lot of offshore oil facilities, and they remembered that during the Iraq-Iran war the Iraqis had been quite successful in long range raids - towards the end of the war, they had been able to conduct raids against Iranian oil facilities in the southern Gulf almost with immunity. The UAE was among the countries which were being yelled and screamed at by the Iraqis at that point. They were one of the countries that were over-producing their oil quota, and the Iraqis were claiming this was driving down prices, and therefore hurting Iraq, and that they were going to get even with the people who were hurting them. The UAE - which had developed a relatively good relationship with CENTCOM - I think decided to put it to a test, and they asked us for these tankers. We down at CENCOM said, yes, let's do it. And, of course, as you can imagine, our leadership in Washington did not feel that was appropriate. I don't know whether David Mack did. He may have.

Q: He said he thought it was. At first they had to go through...ask the Saudis, and the Saudis predictably said no.

BROWN: The Saudis were angry. Kelly didn't want to do it because he'd have to explain it to the Israeli lobby. There was a lot of foot dragging and outright opposition in Washington, but eventually they came around to thinking this wasn't such a bad idea, as a show of American ability to help our friends in time of need. It was just a question of a couple of tankers. I remember that, after days and days of arguing about whether they could go out there, the tankers finally did go out. And then, of course, they had the wrong refueling equipment so they couldn't refuel any of the UAE planes anyway for still another couple of days until we got different kinds of equipment out! It was an interesting drill of American decision making, and it was not one of our finer hours, to be perfectly honest.

Q: According to Mack again, he said this did seem to capture a certain amount of attention of the Iraqis. The only thing we had been sending notes saying don't do anything, but the fact that we actually did something which showed we were willing to project something into the Gulf caught their interest.

BROWN: It certainly didn't cause them to delay.

Q: Before, what was it the 2nd of August? Was there any sort of honing the instrument at CENTCOM, something might happen so let's look a little closer. There were CIA reports of troops massing.

BROWN: Yes. It didn't, however, I think, extend to the level at which it would have been most useful at that point, and that was the actual operational level. There were no operational plans being drafted as a result of this information. People on the intelligence side, people in the plans and policy side, political advisors, the general - we were all following the issue as something that might exacerbate relations. The planes started flying on the night of the 10th. To think that in five days we were actually going to start deploying forces in a major way was not terribly likely. After all, the 82nd Airborne and other units are on permanent standby - and I'm sure some steps were taken to make sure that planes were available, and things could move if they needed to - but it was all done as a kind of routine. When you move up to a certain level of preparedness you make sure you've got the logistic capability to conduct whatever kind of deployment you may need to. There wasn't much being planned in the way of actually doing a deployment, and certainly not the kind of deployment which we were suddenly scheduling ten days later: moving whole divisions of ground troops and tanks.

Q: The Soviet Union by this time...it was still the Soviet Union I believe, but with the reunification of Germany which had happened...

BROWN: The reunification actually didn't take place until October or later, but anyway it was on the way.

Q: The wall had gone down. Was anybody talking about what are we going to do with all this equipment in Europe?

BROWN: No, that wasn't really a concern at the time, maybe it was in other parts of the Defense Department, but in terms of the parochial interest of CENTCOM, CENTCOM did not have any feeling that it had access to the stuff in Europe until much further down the pike.

Q: Can you talk about what you experienced when things started to happen?

BROWN: Well, obviously at first there was a great deal of confusion. Nobody really knew what was going to happen. Nobody knew whether we were going to go, whether we weren't going to go. Schwarzkopf went up to Washington and briefed on what he could do on short notice: send in the 82nd, send some wings of fighter aircraft, and that kind of stuff. That's easy to do. What's hard to do is get the bombs out there, and the artillery pieces, and later on tank divisions. So he was really briefing on instant response, AWACS, aircraft carriers that were in the Gulf.

Q: Diego Garcia, did that play?

BROWN: But even Diego Garcia took some weeks to break out of moth balls and sail over to the Persian Gulf. We were all confused, and I think none of us really expected to get quite the kind of invitation we got from the Saudis in the end. The Saudis, who had previously always been somewhat reluctant to really put their money down, never had had a situation like this - a situation in which they were exposed to something truly threatening. They really surprised us all by saying "Yes, come, and come in a serious manner." Schwarzkopf said, "We can come with 200,000 people", and they said, "Yes, that sounds serious, let's do it". Two hundred thousand was a lot more than the ten thousand we had already sent.

Q: Chas Freeman in my interview said King Fahd normally would never make a decision without going to his Council, but this time actually made the decision right there. "We don't have any time to consult, this is my decision, I'm making it"!

BROWN: Actually, I take the figure back. I think we were talking about 100,000. And then it became 200,000 a week or so later, and then it became an awful lot more later.

Q: What was your role during the very early part. I mean, all of a sudden Saudi Arabia says "Help us". Did you have any part in the Saudi Arabia coming in?

BROWN: No, none at all. That was one of the more interesting elements of confusion. I was sitting in Tampa, with bag packed, ready to go out to Saudi Arabia with General Schwarzkopf. If he was going to be the US representative sent to talk to the King, then he was going to take his whole team and go with him. There was a lot of pulling and hauling going on in Washington and Riyadh as to what team would go, what level, etc. And when we learned that Cheney was going to go and head the team...

Q: He was Secretary of Defense.

BROWN: Yes. To me that was an indication that the Saudis were going to invite us in. I realized that right away. If Schwarzkopf had gone, they would have done the thing you talked about before. The Saudis probably would have said, "Thank you very much for your briefing; now let us consider this; we'll get back to you in a week and let you know whether we've made a decision." The minute we knew that the Secretary of Defense was going to go, that meant that it was raised to a level of political commitment. If Schwarzkopf couldn't make a commitment, Cheney could. I mean Cheney could make a commitment that nobody else could make, and that it was much more likely to happen. But it also meant I wasn't on the plane. Because Cheney took all the people from Washington, and Schwarzkopf wound up leaving from Washington, rather than coming back to CENTCOM and picking up his people and moving out. So we were sweating it out there down in CENTCOM, and when the decision came - we listened to the wires from Riyadh - and when the decision came to send the troops, all hell broke loose. Because they called CENTAF, the Central Command Air Force Detachment, and said, "Send!" And suddenly planes were in the air. I'm on the phone to people in Europe saying, "Planes are in the air and they're going to fly over your country in three hours; can you please get us permission?" And they're all going bananas because all of a sudden things have been launched and there hadn't been any preparation. And planes were flying, and countries were calling our embassies and saying, "What's going on? These planes are coming at us!" It was very confusing for a couple of days. The planes were going to places in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere where they weren't ready to receive them, and there was an endless amount of just plain, "How does it work?" kind of running around that we had to do.

Q: What were you doing?

BROWN: Mostly trying to straighten out the terrible snafus with any number of governments about aircraft movements, about overflight and landing requests, about getting the first deployments out there. Because we didn't forewarn anyone, we just started launching.

Q: Were any countries from your perspective more difficult to deal with than others?

BROWN: At this point it all sort of blends into a blur. I'm reminded by some interviews I'm doing for a book I'm writing now, that the French were difficult at first. The Spanish were pretty obliging all along, and we sent most of the stuff over Spain. But for a while there we had to send stuff around France because things we were sending down from England couldn't go over France; we had to go around France, over Spain to the Mediterranean and across. Luckily there were not too many overflight requests that are needed, usually just Spain.

Q: After you finished that phase-in the first place were you getting both either assistance, or being by-passed? How did you feel from the State Department?

BROWN: This was a point at which my relationship with the State Department didn't matter. To be perfectly honest, I was working directly with the embassies on these kinds of logistical problems, and the logistical problems really ate up our time for the next 8 or 10 days. We (the Headquarters) went out to Saudi Arabia I guess around the 15th of the month; I can't remember exactly when it was. Maybe it was a little bit later. But for those first ten days or so, it had all been just getting the initial wave of troops out there. Getting rid of the problems involved, and explaining to the governments involved that, "Yes, I'm sorry these planes landed in your air base in the middle of the night." Instructing ambassadors who were sometimes not instructed by the State Department, and trying to get things out as fast as possible. A lot of it was done on the phone rather than on telegrams.

Q: How did you find the response?

BROWN: By this time there was an obvious national commitment to do this and everybody was prepared to be helpful. Some countries were less supportive. In the beginning obviously you had the question, that you had to overfly Egypt to get into Saudi airspace. And the Israelis always watched Egyptian airspace, so there was questions there, which I didn't deal much with, because Israel was not in the Central Command area. Q: Was there a feeling of great concern about the fact that it would take a while...we were putting things such as some aircraft and the 82nd Airborne into Saudi Arabia before and it would take a while to build up some more, and the Iraqi army was considered a battle hardened, the forth largest army in the world at that point.

BROWN: Was there concern? Yes, there was concern at headquarters. Did I share it? No, I didn't. My own rather simplistic view was that the Iraqis had never fought except on short supply lines, and that they weren't capable of penetrating in any depth into Saudi Arabia. That once we had fighter aircraft - two wings of fighter aircraft, and sufficient bombs... (which I think was by about the third or fourth day)...bombs and rockets to actually attack advancing columns of tanks - that we were going to be able to stop any Iraqi drive into Saudi Arabia. The military planners didn't believe that, and probably on their scenarios it wasn't a believable scenario. I just felt that the Iraqis wouldn't fight if they were opposed to western air power for a couple days. They wouldn't continue to advance; they'd stop.

Q: It's both flat and open terrain there as we both know. It's not a very good place to try to send columns of tanks if you don't have air superiority which was pretty much the accepted idea wasn't it?

BROWN: Well, we felt that the Iraqis...they still had their air force intact, obviously, but they were not good against other airplanes, and that they didn't know how to do combined exercises. And I felt the prospect of their advancing their tanks under their own air cover was unlikely. And I felt we could pretty effectively disrupt an advance of their tanks. But that was a non-military view. The military were saying they've got X tanks, we've got Y machine guns, and they'll beat us, and they were very worried.

Q: Then what happened after the first about 15 days? I mean you were mainly involved in overflights, and straightening out the diplomatic problems of moving people across other people's countries.

BROWN: And getting them set up in bases in countries which we didn't have any basing rights in. Towards the middle of the month, I'm not sure I know exactly when, the forward headquarters said, all right, we now have a location for you and are ready to move. So we picked up and went off to Riyadh. Once we were there we were thrown immediately into the question of what the military call "bed-down". Where do you deploy these people as they come in? What's their relationship with the local government? How do they get food and water, etc.? A lot of that fell into the realm of government to government relations, or what the military call political affairs. The military did not have political affairs teams at that point. Most of their political affairs teams are in the Reserves and hadn't yet been called up. So they were pretty thin on the ground in terms of being able to negotiate base agreements and all this other stuff. CENTCOM was fanning people out and I was helping provide guidance, essentially where the priorities were, what we needed to do; talking to ambassadors who were saying How do we arrange this, what do we do? A lot of it was trouble-shooting in those first days. It was really organizing and trouble-shooting, setting up negotiations on status of forces so we'd have some agreement as to who supplied the water and the gas and the food. A lot of things had to be arranged on very short order, and not just in Saudi Arabia because I think we started fairly quickly deploying to the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain.

Q: Did the Gulf governments play a role?

BROWN: Not immediately but very shortly afterwards Qatar joined in.

Q: Did you get any assistance from the State Department?

BROWN: At that point we were dealing with issues that the State Department didn't really have any handle on. To the degree we dealt with the State Department we dealt with the Political-Military branch of the State Department.

Q: I was just wondering whether you got a couple junior officers to go out with you and that sort of thing.

BROWN: I was dealing with the Political-Military branch of the State Department on a lot of these overflight requests because I would have a problem and I didn't know the international law. So I would deal with them and they were very helpful. I think it was after I'd been there for about a week or so they said they were sending a guy out, and from then on I always had a deputy. It was generally the same person. Doug Kenney was there for two months. He went away for a while and was replaced by a fellow who wasn't a State Department officer - he was actually an intern or something like that recently from Georgetown Law - a very good fellow, and very interested. They were both very helpful adjuncts because, for one thing, it meant I could get some sleep.

Q: How did you work with the embassies?

BROWN: One of the first things I did when we got to headquarters was phone around to the other embassies, give them my phone number, tell them where I was, and say that they could call me anytime day or night to solve problems that they had with the Command. That was, I think, pretty important: "If you've got a political problem, don't stew over it, tell me about it, we'll talk it over, we'll see if there's a way to deal with it." I knew most of these ambassadors, and frankly Schwarzkopf had done a pretty good job with most of them. So most of them trusted CENTCOM enough, at least, so there was not an adversarial relationship. And as I told Chas Freeman, his relationship with Schwarzkopf was so good that he put me out of a job. In the nine months we were there, I never had to intercede between the embassy and the Command. There was never a problem of any nature which involved...

Q: I find it incredible with Chas Freeman, whom I know having interviewed him extensively, and by reputation Schwarzkopf, that they got along so well. Because Chas Freeman is very much quite an intellectual, and not a screamer or yeller, a man's man type guy. I mean he's much more on the sort of intellectual level.

BROWN: Chas comes off pretty well with the military. He's forthright. I think that's the most important thing that Chas brought to this relationship. And that was obvious to me even when we visited a whole year before - that Chas and Schwarzkopf got along very well. That they trusted each other; Chas spoke straight to Schwarzkopf. When we got there, Chas said essentially to Schwarzkopf at the first meeting, "You are going to be what's going on here for the foreseeable future. You understand that it is very important to make it work politically." As a matter of fact, Chas even had a conversation with Schwarzkopf when he was out there in the briefing of the King. He said, The worse thing that could happen is if the deployment affects the Saudi generals, the Saudi population, the Saudi public's impression of Americans negatively, because then the King will have real trouble supporting it. So you have to understand that your troops have to come briefed, and to come and behave. And Schwarzkopf accepted that from the beginning. So once they had that understanding - that was even before we got there, or before a decision was made to get there - the Command's response to Chas Freeman was, "Tell us what we need to avoid; what we need to do; and we'll do it - because the most important thing is to make this work with the Saudis." And with that instruction from the top, Schwarzkopf had more trouble with his people internally than he had with the embassy. His people were furious with him: General Order One which said, No booze, No this, No that, and all the other things that were no-nos. Can you imagine the military saying: We're going to live by Muslim rules while we're here in Saudi Arabia? They didn't like it at all. But it was very important in setting the tone. It was important that the relationship with the Saudis be protected, and that we had to be almost leaning over backwards in order to avoid incidents. There was a lot of resentment in the military. But Schwarzkopf took it, and he said it was more important that we deal with the Saudis on a constructive basis than we have perpetual little picky fights with them. We still had lots of picky fights with them: every time a GI pissed on a wall for the first three weeks, we'd get a phone call from the Minister of Defense saying, "Your guy, or your woman, has desecrated the holy land!" And Schwarzkopf keep trying to kick it down to the working levels channels which Chas Freeman was trying to set up. And, of course, the Saudi decision making authority kicks everything up to the highest level, because nobody can decide at a low level. So we in fact made the Saudis, in the end, kick these kinds of issues down to the local commander level so they didn't become politicized. After a couple of weeks of working on it - and Chas Freeman and his embassy, worked effectively with commanders as they came. He sent people from the embassy down to where the troops were being deployed and said, "General so-and-so, I want you to meet the governor of the province; this guy is important; you talk to him. You name the guy to be liaison with him, he'll liaison with you, call me if there is any problem. I don't want to hear anything about any problem going beyond that level." It worked. Freeman got the embassy to intercede. So the Pol-Mil side of the Command really didn't have to do this. The embassy was actively engaged in making sure that it worked at the unit level.

Q: Obviously you were busy as hell. What after this network in relationship had been organized. Then what?

BROWN: It was interesting because once the Command goes into a war-fighting, or war planning mode, they're interested in the political advisor only to tell them what's going on in the rest of the world. So my role from then on was in an essence to brief them about what the Syrians were saying, what the Jordanians were saying, etc. It was essentially briefing the General and the other members of the Command on what was going on. And in continuing to solve these endless little operational problems as they came up. To say the systems were in place, and things worked, is not to say there weren't day to day crises; there were. But by and large they worked. We traveled a lot to the other states. I traveled with Schwarzkopf to help bed down the troops; to thank the local rulers for their support and assistance. We traveled to Taif to talk to the Kuwaitis, etc. There were always things to do. My role was not central, however, at that point. My role was definitely very much in support, and looking for places to make an input, and once again listening to what people were saying, and going to the staff meeting and saying, "Are you really thinking of doing that? Do you know what the political consequences are going to be if you work it through? Get your staff on the political consequences, because I can tell you right off the bat that X, Y, Z are likely to a problem." So a lot of it was that, not even working with Schwarzkopf, but working with the Director of Plans, working with the Director of Operations, etc., as I saw them doing things which I thought were going to have political repercussions that they might not have thought about.

Q: This incredible coalition with the Syrians, the Egyptians, French, British and almost anybody else you can think of. Normally a political advisor would sort of nudge the general and say, you've got this Syrian, you've got to watch this subject, get them ready. Would you find yourself in that position?

BROWN: This is where a retentive memory was such a great boon to Schwarzkopf and to me. I would quite often learn that Schwarzkopf was meeting with somebody at the last minute, because the schedule kept changing, and I wouldn't have a chance to run into him and say, "Don't forget this guy is a cousin of the minister, of whatever the hell." He didn't have a briefing paper - you couldn't do it, you didn't have time. And sometimes you didn't even get to sit in on the meeting, or you didn't know that the meeting was taking place. Then Schwarzkopf would come back to staff meeting and relate about what had gone on. I was so happy time after time to see Schwarzkopf, out of his memory, reflect things I'd told him a year before. Or he'd turn to me and say, "Did we do that right, or should we have..?.etc." But quite often, you were playing catch-up - and that was the hardest part of my job - feeling that once they went into this frenzy of activity, the normal staff pace just disappeared, and I never could find a way to plug in in advance. On some things I couldn't find a way to plug in, particularly on Schwarzkopf's schedule. But he has a very retentive memory, as I said before, and was very conscious of the political impact of what he was doing, and he remembered things that we told him before on our trips, things that he'd done on his trips, and he was able, I think, to deal much more effectively in many ways with almost all of the foreigners, than he was with his own staff. He was really very good on the political side. But not thanks to me; I was running around and catching up.

Q: How about with the Emirates and Bahrain? Any particular problems there?

BROWN: No, really there were so few problems after the first couple of weeks that you got down to relatively routine things about negotiating status of forces agreements, introducing new elements into the mix - like all of a sudden, I remember once, Baker had been to Rome and convinced the Italians that they wanted to contribute to the force, and the next thing we knew there were some Italian airplanes coming in. Nobody knew where to send them. Those kinds of things, and phoning an embassy and saying, "Could you please talk to the Minister of Defense and ask him if he'd take a wing of Italian aircraft, because we don't want them in Saudi Arabia. We don't have a place to park them." There were points in which even those super jumbo size Saudi airports were wing to wing with airplanes. Literally, if the Iraqis had had long range missiles it would have been a shooting match, a shooting gallery.

Q: What about visitors? Chas Freeman said that one of the greatest crosses he had to bear during that thing was the literally thousands of visitors who came, Congress people, everybody wanted to get in. He said sometimes he'd cross the Saudi Peninsula three or four times a day. Did that intrude onto you?

BROWN: No. Saudi Arabia became, as Chas likes to call it, a military theme park for people in Washington who came out to see it. A nice thing about a military command is its staffing: Schwarzkopf had a protocol division, and a press division - this is a big command - and a whole plans division which dealt with the protocol division. So when there were visitors - the majority of them were Congressman, or military guys, the Secretary of Defense, the general of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Congressmen were the key ones, or journalists - all those were dealt with by staff. In the staff, there were congressional relations people out in Riyadh to tell which congressmen had voted which way on the latest appropriations bills. So it was a complete staff operation out there after a while, and these visitors kept the general very very busy. I would have a role to play, sure, but I was never in charge of visits, or never run around like Chas Freeman was because I wasn't in the top echelon on those matters.

Q: Was there any change in your role when the air war started? To catch the mood first, up until around October of 1990 what was the feeling that you had, and maybe others around you, about how this thing was going to play out?

BROWN: To be perfectly honest, I think the majority of people in the Command always thought there was going to be a 12th hour political settlement, and the Arabs would cobble something together to get Saddam out. And most of them feared the terms would not be satisfactory from our point of view, but that we wouldn't have any option but to accept. I think it wasn't until really December, even January, that they began to realize that Saddam wasn't going to back out. I think even with the Russian last minute heroics in an effort to negotiate a deal in January, there was still expectation that the Russians would do it. People kept looking at me and saying, Gordon, aren't the politicians going to pull this one out, or are we going to have to go to war? The interesting thing was that a lot of those generals didn't want to go to war. The colonels kind of wanted to go to war. The colonels all have weapon systems, or something like that, which they wanted to prove. But the generals who were going to give the orders to get people killed weren't that gung-ho on the whole idea.

But your question raised something else. It seems to me that one of the things, before the air war started, one of the questions was: What is the effect of a bombing campaign? What are the psychological impacts? What impact does it have on maintaining the coalition? And one of the things we worried about in CENTCOM was what actions by the military forces would be counter-productive to coalition solidarity. There had been a long debate, never conclusively finished, as to how long the bombing campaign could survive before the Arab street, or whatever, became a factor in stopping the war politically. There would be riots in Cairo because the Americans were killing Arabs in Baghdad. I can recall as early as September we were still saying a 20-day bombing campaign was the maximum we could manage: "After 20 days the Arab world will be seething with unrest, and the Arabs won't be able to go to war against Iraq as a result. We need the Arabs to make the whole thing credible to liberate Kuwait." So that was a big issue, and as a net result I got involved in some of the targeting. Not because people wanted me to, but because, as I said, it was one of the places where I would go. And I would say, "What are you planning to target in downtown Baghdad? Well, that's okay if you can get it surgically; that one isn't so good because if you miss you're going to kill 20,000 people because this is a crowded area of town; that's an antiquity site, don't touch it; that's a holy place, don't touch it." We red-lined a lot of places. But I got into that kind of through the side door. I knew some Majors who were working on it. Because, you see, that wasn't in CENTCOM. The actual bombing lists were made up over at what they called Black Hole, over in the CENTAF, the air command headquarters, and the actual bombing lists you didn't see until the night before. It was rather awkward. I didn't like this system and I tried to get it changed the whole time, and never succeeded. The bombing lists would come over the night before and you'd say, "This is what we're going to bomb tonight as 0200?" and I'd see some things on that list and I'd say, Holy shit. Sometimes we'd get them out, but too often we'd make a phone call and they'd say, Too late, the planes are already in the air and refueled over Iraq, or something like that.

Things got better, of course, after we hit the bunker, and we killed all those people who were taking shelter there.

Q: We're talking about killing a lot of civilians in the bunkers.

Q: This is one of the big things that was talked about again and again by commentators, and people dealing in the Middle East. They kept talking about, wait until the Arab mobs start coming out in the streets. This was, I won't say a myth, but it was the idea that somehow, no matter what happened, you're going to have great mobs coming out and supporting Iraq, which didn't happen.

BROWN: It really didn't. The Iraqis weren't successful in places where it would have counted, in places like Cairo, Damascus. Amman, of course, was pro-Iraqi but it could have been even more so, I suppose. The fact that mobs were organized in Tunis, Sanaa, and Rabat probably didn't matter all that much. Certainly, if there had been any in Saudi Arabia it would have been dangerous. Sometimes it pays to have autocratic regimes as your friends! In fact, the Saudis and the Egyptians and the Syrians could bottle up public opinion, and even more importantly bottle up the intelligence services. In some other countries, the Iraqi military attachés were seen on the street handing out money to people, but that didn't happen where it counted. The Iraqi military attachés were put under heavy surveillance.

Q: Did you get at all involved in any of the discussions, what's going to happen with the Israelis. The Iraqis were trying to provoke the Israelis in the war.

BROWN: No, for two reasons. One, Israel wasn't in our area of command. Two, that was handled entirely in Washington. The third reason, was that Israel was never mentioned in the coalition except by very high level people. Baker, if you read his book, went around to government chiefs and heads of state and said, "Would you continue to fight if Israel were brought into this war by Iraqi action?" And they would say yes. "Would you fight if Israel preempted?" Maybe. But at our level, we never, never dared raise that. It was too hot a subject, and we didn't have enough political guidance, and it was done entirely from Washington.

Q: What was the feeling that you were getting in your part of the command about how the ground war would go? I mean, as things progressed and the air war went on.

BROWN: Well, once we had a scenario that looked like a winning scenario - and that was maybe mid-November when we began to develop the left hook, as it was called - I think that the main fear was that the journalists would cotton on to it, and let the Iraqis know what was coming. Hence, the restrictions on journalists which they fought, and still are fighting, but which in the end made it possible for us to win the war. And the second consideration was how costly it would be; not whether we would win. Some of us thought maybe we'd have to fight for three weeks, two weeks, maybe lose up to 10,000 people. There were any number of estimates made by the people in the think tank part of the Command, but they were using attrition formulas (as they call it) which were developed for other kinds of warfare, and not the kind of warfare they had.

Which leads me to a point which has nothing at all to do with, I suppose, my career. But one of the things I did help deal with was the psy-war effort, the psychological warfare effort. And I think the psychological warfare effort was launched too late, and there wasn't enough of it. But even then, it was tremendously effective. The fact that we met, when our troops finally did cross the line, a demoralized Iraqi army, had as much to do with the psychological warfare effort as it had to do with the bombing. The two combined were absolutely deadly. The Iraqi troops were already so softened up by the time our troops came across the line, that they surrendered by droves. The psychological warfare campaign was hindered by limitation that you couldn't conduct a military psychological warfare campaign until war had actually been launched. So we couldn't do anything until January 17th, and then we started doing things against the front line troops. The front line troops were very softened up. They would get leaflets saying, We're going to bomb you tomorrow night; if you want to take a hike in the desert and come back and look at your destroyed equipment, that will be the smartest thing for you to do; if you want to take a hike south, and turn yourself in, that will be even smarter. We gave them leaflets: We're coming; turn this in you'll be a comfortable and well fed POW. What we never did, because we didn't have the equipment, or we didn't want to devote the equipment, or we didn't want to devote the time, was to do any psychological warfare in Baghdad. I think that was a mistake. I argued early on that we should be converting some of the long range missiles to...

Q: Tomahawks.

BROWN: ...particularly the air launched ones, which are relatively slow. We should change the warheads on those to leaflet warheads. We should cover Baghdad with leaflets saying, This is the war of your leaders; this is not your war- take appropriate action, get rid of your leaders; refuse to fight, or sabotage the nearest electricity station, whatever. We never did it. They claimed that they didn't have those kind of warheads, and it would take too long to devise them. I really don't know, but in any event we tried at one point or another to put an aircraft in the air and broadcast radio to Baghdad. But it was too late, and we didn't have the range, and we didn't get the air cover that we needed to get closer in. I think we missed a shot in not engaging the propaganda warfare in the capital city. It might have given us a little bit better odds in getting rid of Saddam at that time.

Q: Was it ever brought to your attention about what the terms would be for surrender?

BROWN: Another failure on my part; I had a number of failures. They bombed too many bridges for my taste in Baghdad. I never got propaganda going in Baghdad, which I wanted. Probably, in retrospect, I should have raised it much more persistently at a much higher level than I did. And the third one was that we never had any planning for war termination. The Command wasn't prepared. That's political as far as the command was concerned and they wanted political instructions. And to every visitor who came through from Washington, I would say, "Where is the war termination scenario? My friend and I here have been sitting down, and we have some interesting pieces of paper we could present to you. Where's the scenario? When do we know that we've got what we want?" And they would all say yes, yes, and go back to Washington, and we'd hear nothing. My conclusion from talking to a lot of people is that there was a lot of war termination planning done at the staff level in various places around town, but the minute anybody tried to raise it at the policy level, it was killed. Partly because of the contradictions inherent in the coalition. You couldn't get the coalition to sign on to any one given plan, so you didn't even try. And partly because we ourselves didn't think...maybe we felt we had more time to think about it than we did. In the end the war was over so fast we didn't even think about a termination scenario. We were still negotiating the termination of the war ten days after it was over, and we negotiated it in New York. Schwarzkopf went to Safwan, which is the place where the cease-fire was signed, under instructions not to take me, or not to raise any political issue. And then, of course, there were political issues-flying helicopters, withdrawing to the borders, and things like that.

Q: Why was he under instructions not to take you?

BROWN: Because it was supposed to be a military cease-fire, period. Cessation of hostilities. And the minute you had a political advisor, the signal was that that made it a political negotiation. I never understood that, but he told me he couldn't take me, under instructions. I don't think I would have changed anything. There was no planning for the peace, and therefore they didn't want to address it at that point.

Q: So he didn't have a list of things you want done.

BROWN: He had a list of things he wanted done and he cleared it with the Defense Department, which cleared it with the State Department. But those were mainly military things: cease-fire in place, resupply, exchange of prisoners, who could move to join their units, really military things. Schwarzkopf said in his conversations with the Iraqi generals in Safwan, he said, "We will occupy your territory up to this point. You will get that back at some time. We do not intend to be there indefinitely. If you comply with the conditions of the cease-fire, you will get this back in due course." In fact, the minute he won, he wanted to start withdrawing his troops. He may or may not have turned down some proposals which I understand were made about putting in UN troops, buffer zones, and that kind of stuff. But there was never a national policy and Schwarzkopf never had any instructions. So he took his authority, went to Safwan, and made the decisions which made some other decisions impossible.

Q: When he came back with the agreement, did you see it and vet it at all?

BROWN: He'd already vetted it in Washington essentially. By the time he got back it had already been sent in to Washington. I didn't see any problems with it, except...in fact, in that respect I was surprised at myself....but I was pleased with the fact that he told the Iraqi generals that we were not alienating their territory, we were only occupying it temporarily. In retrospect, it would have been better if we'd left that gray, because it would have led them to perhaps make an effort at a coup with Saddam. Any pressure we could put on the regime at that time would have been useful.

Q: You mentioned before on the bombing we shouldn't have bombed as many bridges in Baghdad. Why was that?

BROWN: I didn't think bridges in Baghdad were a valid military target. You were going to cut out communications in Baghdad; you were fairly close in some places in downtown Baghdad to hitting heavily occupied areas. And, symbolically, you were going after civilian targets. People wouldn't accept that they were military targets that far from the front, and they were being taken out fairly late in the bombing campaign. I thought this was just a bad move; that basically there was no reason to do it. Their argument was that the Iraqis had buried cable communications and they didn't know where the cable was, but they knew that it had to cross the rivers. And they knew that the cables crossed the rivers under the bridges - along the girders of the bridges they had cables. They didn't know which communication cable they were going to hit at any given time, but they had to hit all bridges in order to break the communication cables. So they did. Maybe one bridge they didn't hit, because I really convinced them that this was very dangerous. Sort of like hitting the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

Q: So the cease-fire was done. What happened to you? I thought we might finish up this particular phase.

BROWN: Then we moved into questions of prisoners of war, treatment of prisoners of war, Geneva Convention, all these kinds of things that the army knows something about but always needs political advice. I was back and forth with the Political-Military Bureau about what could be done and what couldn't be done, and with the lawyers. How were the Saudis going to treat all these people who were coming across? Who were going to be transferred to Saudi control? Who was going to be kept under military control? Reconstruction of Kuwaiti issues began to come through the Command at that point; I got involved in those. Took a trip up to Kuwait to look at some things and talked to people there. We immediately turned to the post-war in many ways. How do you get out? And, frankly, I remember the refrain in the Command in those days was... every day I'd show up, and people would say, "Okay Gordon, we've done our job, when are you going to do yours? Get us a peace, get us a withdrawal." If you remember, it took almost three weeks to get the UN resolution through which was the peace terms, and the Iraqis took another week or so to accept it. They couldn't even start talking withdrawal for quite a while, and even then Schwarzkopf refused to withdraw Command Headquarters until more than 50% of the troops had gone home. So his idea was to push the troops out as fast as he could. So the pushing out of the troops became mostly a logistical problem, but some of it was political too.

Q: Before we leave this, you mentioned status of forces agreements while things were moving on. Traditionally, within the Foreign Service, the Pentagon lawyers are considered to be one of the most difficult groups to negotiate with as far as the Foreign Service is concerned because they want to have everything. They want complete control. In an emergency situation how did you work with the legal section on Pentagon work?

BROWN: It really wasn't bad. In the front office at State we developed our model agreement with the Saudis, or the Bahrainis, I don't recall which, and then peddled it around the rest of the Gulf. And everybody was prepared to be cooperative because they needed an agreement, they needed any kind of an agreement to make sure the guy who pissed on the wall wasn't going to get thrown into a local court. The desire for an agreement, the desire to get this one at least resolved meant that people stopped being petty. The agreements were also pretty much skeleton agreements compared to the ones we have in effect now.

Q: What about women in the military? Did this give you much of a problem on your side, or not?

BROWN: It gave us all problems for a little while because, as I mentioned earlier, everything that happened for a few weeks got escalated to the level of the Commander. But after a while, the Saudis calmed down and there were certain rules of conduct. The women couldn't go around in their T-shirts, but as long as they wore sleeved shirts - and mind you at 150 degrees it's not ____.

Q: My wife had that same problem with dresses when we were in Dhahran in the '50s.

BROWN: But the desert camouflage are not light weight by any means. So, a woman truck driver, in her truck with her shirt on - no problem, could drive anyplace, do anything. When she got out of the truck, went some place, if it was with the US military it was fine, if it was in town she had to have her shirt on, etc., etc. Anything that the troops did in their own camp was permitted. But, for example, the chaplains had to take off their lapel insignia if they left the camp; they couldn't wear their crosses or the Star of David. Those things got routinized after a while, and people didn't really mind. To be perfectly honest, the military commanders were rather amazed at the low level of discipline problems they had. They said, maybe a booze-free army isn't such a bad idea.

Q: I understand that considering the number of troops involved for the same periods they would have, including the war, they would have had higher casualties in Germany because of the driving and drinking which they didn't have that problem.

BROWN: And the Saudis learned finally to live with the United States presence. There were times when it got awkward, for example when there was a driving demonstrations by Saudi wives, and things like that which lifted it up to the level of political visibility. But once they learned they could solve these problems locally, and people were satisfied to have them solved locally, they got solved locally. And the local governors and the American military authorities worked pretty closely together to resolve problems.

Q: During this time what about the Scud attacks on Riyadh?

BROWN: Other than to say we tracked them as they came in and they went boom - and luckily up until the very end they didn't create much damage - there wasn't much effect on the ground. Everybody thought it was sort of a joke, and hoped they didn't hit anything serious. The missile which fell on that barrack was the only major damage. They fell on empty schools and empty parking lots, so really very little damage done - and we were very pleased to see that very little damage was done in Israel too, because the real fear in headquarters was that the Israelis would take a swipe at the Iraqis, which would then broaden the war - which we didn't like.

Q: You left there when?

BROWN: I don't remember. I was on the same plane Schwarzkopf went home on, May 15 or something like that, I can't recall. 1991.

Q: And then what?

BROWN: By that time I had been selected for ambassador to Nouakchott, so I was released from the Command, I think, a couple of days after Schwarzkopf's change of command ceremony. But anyway, somewhere along that spring and summer I went back to Washington. Actually, I stayed in Tampa but I became more and more focused on my upcoming assignment.

Q: Okay. We'll pick it up next time getting ready to going off to Mauritania.

-

Today is the 30th of January 1997. Did you have the feeling that somebody said, this Gordon Brown did all right in the Gulf war, let's send him to Nouakchott. How did you get your appointment to go to Mauritania?

BROWN: That's hard to say. When you start jockeying around for chief of mission-type appointments, there are so many things that enter into the mix that you really don't have a clue what it is eventually that gets you the job. Or at least I didn't. In my case, I know that certain people in the Director General's office were trying to get me a post. I was getting better support there than I was getting from other parts of the Department. The African Bureau had, over the years, kind of made some of the Saharan posts available to Arabists on the theory that NEA had a lot of good candidates, and didn't have very many posts, whereas the African Bureau had a lot of posts - some Arab-speaking posts. So I was at some point or other asked if I wanted to run for either Niger or Mauritania. I thought it over. Mauritania is an Arab-speaking country, and I was leaning in that direction when they told me I should definitely lean in that direction, because the other viable candidate for a post that year was a woman, and she had just chosen Niger - and since women had the upper hand in the assignment process, I was left with Mauritania. I really don't know how I got the job. I do remember that Larry Eagleburger, the Deputy Secretary, when I met him before going out to post, asked me what I'd done wrong, to get Nouakchott!. It was not a post that was being fought after by a lot of people - as I discovered when I got to Washington. Mauritania's behavior during the Gulf War, and during a previous crisis with Senegal, had put it deep in the doghouse in Washington. I was taking over a pariah post.

Q: You were in Mauritania from when to when?

BROWN: '91 to '94.

Q: In '91 what did they tell you? Explain about the pariah post, and what were you getting out of Washington before you went there. Did you have any objectives in mind as you went out to the place?

BROWN: To put it in context, Mauritania is an ethnically divided country, governed by Arabs, but with substantial populations of peoples linked to the neighboring African countries, particularly Senegal. Border problems with Senegal in '89 had created a crisis, with blood shed in riots on both sides of the border and mutual expulsions of the other's citizens. The Mauritians went further, and expelled some Mauritians who happened to be ethnically related to Senegal, in an effort at that point I guess somewhat motivated by ethnic cleansing considerations. They wanted to get rid of a lot of African -Mauritians who were in the army and civil service, and who had contacts south of the border and were considered to be a fifth column for the Senegalese. So they went into a purge. They were partly pushed into that by the fact they were fairly closely allied with the Iraqis at that point and subjected to some strong doses of Arab nationalist sentiment. They made some really bad mistakes. They'd also refused to support us in the Gulf War. They hadn't lined up with Iraq, but they hadn't supported us either, so they were thoroughly in the doghouse. By the time I took over the embassy in '91 I discovered how much they were discredited in Washington. Our embassy had been cut down to a staff of four or five people as a result of the two crises and the Gulf-War related drawdown..

Q: In the first place you were in the AF Bureau.

BROWN: Nouakchott is in the AF Bureau, which, of course, is an anomaly. It's an Arab country in an African Bureau, and the African Bureau has a certain point of view. The way ethnic strife is conducted in borderline states - Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, all of those border line states with Arab/African splits- tends to give them a bad reputation in the African Bureau just to begin with.

Q: Did you go out with, I mean outside of wishes of good luck, were there any encouragements to do something when you went out there, or was it keep the flag flying.

BROWN: We were now in the post-Cold War period, and we were looking at America's new role of promoting a world of states like us, and therefore what we were trying to do in states like Mauritania, where we had very few other interests, was simply to get them to accept some of our governing principles. Specifically: fair treatment on human rights problems, and some kind of participatory government - democracy, whatever you want to call it. The Mauritians were, of course, way behind the eight ball on the question of human rights, and on participatory democracy. They started moving forward slowly and reluctantly, but nonetheless somewhat, while I was there. My instructions were relatively simple: try to push these two agenda items, to push for fair treatment of all Mauritians under generally accepted principles of equal treatment for ethnic minorities. And try to get some kind of democratization, good decent elections, etc. Other than that, it was the usual instruction: Take care of US policy interests in the UN, Middle East peace process, do trade, do good consular work, etc. But we had no real interests; therefore our objectives were extremely generalized, and were pointed to human rights.

Q: What about the boundary, Algeria, Morocco and Mali and Senegal. How were things along those boundaries?

BROWN: There are no boundary problems as such except a minor one in Senegal, but the state of Mauritania is not a truly secure state. It has neighbors who don't particularly wish it well on most sides, and a powerful neighbor to the north, Morocco, which is not necessarily friendly. So Mauritania has a great deal of paranoia in its policy about its encirclement by non-friendly states, and it tends to look toward the United States as part of the problem, because of our good relations with Morocco and Senegal, rather than part of the solution. So there was some anxiety about border issues and security issues. But most of our problems were about internal Mauritanian affairs. And this is an awkward position that ambassadors are put in these days, because we are asked to get governments to change their internal behavior. We are accused, I think, sometimes fairly accurately, of interfering with their internal affairs because of the portfolio we are pushing on human rights - which are Ministry of Interior type responsibilities in most of these countries. And democracy, which is also a Ministry of Interior issue for them rather than a foreign policy issue. So ambassadors who are pushing for social and political reform, on the basis of American foreign policy goals, are put in a kind of awkward position to begin with.

Q: When you arrived there how did you find you were received? Did they figure here is somebody out of Desert Storm and is sent to sort of rub our nose in backing the losing side.

BROWN: They were very, very apprehensive. Exactly - that I was sent out by General Schwarzkopf to clobber them!

Q: Case the joint.

BROWN: I tried quite hard to encourage them to consider me as a friendly interlocutor. But given the fact that almost all those issues I had to raise with them had to do with, directly or indirectly, support for their minorities and their trans-border friends, I was seen as a security problem - not only because of the place I came from, but as a result of the fact that I was essentially pushing a hostile set of issues, a pro-Senegalese set of issues.

Q: Well, Senegal had had a pretty nasty government for a long time.

BROWN: No, you're thinking of Guinea. Senegal was run by Abu Diouf, who had been a long-time friend of the United States, and a "long time Democrat" (although democracy in Senegal was just as peculiar as it is anywhere else in that part of the world). We nonetheless were very friendly with Senegal, and Senegal got a great deal of USAID money. We had defense cooperation with Senegal. It made me look rather suspicious in Mauritania, when I was pushing issues which favored Mauritanian minorities who were allied with Senegal.

Q: These were basically what we would call black African groups.

BROWN: Mauritania is an interesting country. There are Arabs who are light skinned. There are Arabs who are very dark skinned, many from the Haratines, the slave caste. And then there are Mauritians who are very dark skinned, but not Arab speaking, not Arab in culture, not in the Arab world emotionally or politically, but are rather allied to related tribal groups in Mali or Senegal. The biggest tribal or ethnic group in Mauritania at this time, other than the Arabs, were the Halpulaar. They are related to the clans in Senegal, and many of them are so well intermarried and interrelated that they have relatives in Senegal who hold government positions - some have very high government positions. So they are seen by the Arab ruling class in Mauritania as not entirely trustworthy Mauritians. And yet I was pushing issues which essentially asked for redress for the people from this ethnic group who had been punished during the crisis of '89-'90, and the result was seen as pushing a pro-Senegalese agenda.

Q: How does one push something like this? I mean, you're the ambassador there and what does one do to push?

BROWN: Well, you go and you talk about the need for national reconciliation, and the fact that they are going to remain essentially in our doghouse until they allow the refugees back. They have to treat the expelled people fairly - give them back their property when they do come back. So you're talking about human rights issues, and people who were expelled during the crisis. And you're talking about opening up voting lists and opening up political activities for opposition parties. And in the circumstances, of course, the opposition parties immediately organized themselves around these expelled people, and the ethnic groups who had been hurt during "The Troubles." So in both cases, when you're arguing for opposition groups, you're arguing a case which the Mauritanian government felt relatively difficult to take. So it was an awkward assignment, to be perfectly honest.

Q: What was in it for them to pay any attention to you?

BROWN: We're the United States of America. If we were Ecuador or even Luxembourg they wouldn't pay any attention to us. In fact, if we were Spain they wouldn't pay any attention to us, probably. But we are the United States of America, and they wanted to be on our good side. The trouble is they don't want to do anything that is politically threatening, or costly to themselves. So they always walked this line between wanting to please the American ambassador - because maybe that would make the American ambassador get Washington, or allow the American ambassador to get Washington to be a little bit less unfriendly. And yet, they really are not prepared to pay a great domestic price for a foreign policy advantage. The foreign minister would go to the Council of Ministers meeting and say, "The American Ambassador needs something from us." And the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defense, all the political people around the President would say that somebody out in the back woods was not going to like that, that they couldn't do it if it didn't sell in their version of Peoria. So the foreign policy considerations were always put on the back burner, and the ambassador of the United States was told that they would try to move next week.

Q: What about UN votes?

BROWN: The Mauritians have a long and conspicuous policy of taking a hike whenever there's a very difficult UN vote. I shouldn't be too cynical. The one place where we had a serious issue with the Mauritians and their neighbors during the years I was there was the question of the isolation of Libya. They were pretty good on that. They maintained the boycott against Libya. They told us they didn't like it, but they told us it was a UN decision and they'd have to live with it, and they did.

Q: I would think Mauritania would be an ideal place for the Libyans to mess around, with money and a place that could be bought, fellow Arabs and all that.

BROWN: Indeed it was. The Libyans had messed around in it, and probably were messing around a little bit while we were there. But nothing serious, to be perfectly honest. Mauritanian internal policy was quite often played out through groups which allied themselves with foreign sponsors. And yes, the Libyans had become the sponsors of a group of people in the government that called themselves the Nasserists, or the Nationalists. They were opposed, I suppose in the kind of in-fighting that went on, to another Arab group known as the Baath, who were getting their support from Iraq. As I suggested earlier the Baathis had had a fairly good run in '89-'90 and the Libyans were kind of on the outskirts. I think that, when the Mauritians discovered that their infatuation with Arab politics had gotten them off on some pretty bad tangents in '89-'90, they learned the lesson - not that they should dump the Baathis and then go with the Libyan-backed people - but that they should dump all Arab politics and try to develop their own national agenda.

Q: Did you find the Palestinian-Israeli problem on your front burner?

BROWN: No, it was definitely on the second burner, but it was there and the Mauritians did feel that this was an area where they could give me something. As I said, they never gave me much that cost them anything in terms of their internal political balance. But they did give the United States quite a bit on the Arab-Israel issue, and they became relatively reliable for "yes" votes, when the Madrid Peace Conference was going forward, when the multilateral talks were going forward. They have no clout in the Arab world but they did step out and say yes, We'll take part in multilateral talks at this point. And after I left they're talking with Israel; they were ready to move in that direction, and they did. It didn't buy them anything in Washington, because I was reporting back to the African Bureau, which didn't give a damn.

Q: Could you describe the Mauritanian government?

BROWN: While I was there the Mauritanian government converted itself from a government of military rule they'd had since 1978 when the first military coup took place. They'd had a government which essentially disbanded the constitution, or ignored the previous constitution, and ruled by military decree. To their credit they passed, shortly before I got there, a fairly liberal French-style constitution. It gives the presidency quite a bit of power, with two houses of parliament, and a lot of trappings of democracy. All the military people in the government took off their uniforms and retired, and some of them ran for office and got elected, including the president. There was a certain amount of dishonesty, but not a tremendous amount. It was then declared a civilian government, and the houses of parliament began to operate. There were parliamentary elections - also slightly dishonest, but not egregiously so given the setting, and given the lack of history in Mauritania of any kind of democracy in that country and part of the world. They were working fairly cautiously towards opening up government in some way or another, while at the same time not wanting to lose control. The President never lost control, he remained president during the transition - still is, and frankly over time has probably been able to reassert his control as strong as it ever was before '89 or '90. He didn't install "democracy" in his country because he's a democrat, but rather because of '89 or '90. He saw the imperative need to give himself a new mandate after the disasters of 89-90.

Q: Could you describe Nouakchott as a place?

BROWN: Yes. I went out there, having heard all these stories about the sand coming over the wall of the embassy compound, and discovered that the city had really grown up. It scarcely qualifies as a city. It was built as an administrative capital; it was supposed to be under 50,000 people. But then the desert - I won't say desert economy - but the rural economy, which had been a pastoral economy, broke down because of the great Sahelian drought of ten years, in the '70s and '80s. All the people who came to town made the city grow to a half million people, on an infrastructure of a town of 50,000. So what we had was a little nucleus of a city with streets which were paved. (Although quite often they and all the gutters were full of sand. Until the first time they cleaned the streets I didn't even realize there had been gutters because it was sand except in the middle. When they cleaned it, you found sidewalks and gutters - but within months it would fill up again with sand.) You had this nucleus, shops, a couple of tall buildings, markets, mosques, etc., a pretty small town but still decent with occasional trees. Not a bad place, close to the coast and fairly decent living.

Around that nucleus the town had grown up in a complete hodge podge. There were nice suburbs with big villas, with gardens which were just getting established; some had been built in the last three or four years; a lot of building going on while we were there. There were other suburbs which were absolute shanty towns of people who had come in from desert after having had to sell their animals, because the desert had been too tough a place to live, and come to town with nothing. They lived in tin shacks, cardboard shacks, plastic shacks. It was pretty nasty. So it's a very mixed town, but you could find things to buy there in cluttered shops. There's a Lebanese trading community, and there's enough of a diplomatic community so that there's enough purchasing power to support a couple of good stores, and a lot of good importation. This is one of those places where the freight planes came in a couple of times a week, and the next day you'd have fresh produce from France in the stores, and it would be bought out by the time the next plane came in. You lived from planeload to planeload.

Q: Where did the money come from?

BROWN: There's quite a bit of money in the iron ore mine which is the original reason why the French gave independence to Mauritania - because there's a very good iron ore mine in the north of the country which makes a fair amount of money. And there's quite a bit of money, of course, in fisheries off the coast. It's a very rich fishery. So the government makes a fair amount of money, and parcels it out in ways which would allow for a trickle down economy. So there's quite a few rich people, and even a slightly developing middle class, in that country.

Q: What about the embassy? How did you find the staff, was it sort of hard to keep everybody happy?

BROWN: Well, I think not, in answer to your last question. The embassy was small. We started off, I think, a little over 20 people when I got there, plus Marines. The Marine contingent was closed shortly after I left, but it was still there when I was there - but we reduced to maybe 13 people or so. I think the embassy now is down to eight or ten people, under ten people anyway, no Marines. So we were shrinking all the time I was there, and since we didn't have that much of a reason for being there, the shrinking was entirely appropriate, and natural. There is a point at which the shrinking might make it difficult for us to do any job well, but that hadn't been reached while I was there. We were trying to do many of the things a normal embassy does. We suffered, I think, by virtue of the fact that we were completely abandoned by USIA. We tried very hard to put on public diplomacy programs with our own time and our own efforts and so on; we got a little bit of support from USIA to do that, but it was difficult. We did some trade promotion. We had an increasing consular load. And we did a fair amount of political reporting because - whether or not Mauritania was of interest to more than ten people in the Department or not - those ten people created quite a need for careful explanation and discussion about developments. So, a fair amount of standard political reporting.

You asked me whether we could keep things happy. I think we had a very good group of people who were interested, and who like me got intrigued in trying to understand what is a very fascinating country, and traveled quite a bit. Most of us were good in French. Frankly, I think, we had a good crowd, people who enjoyed the post and found a small post like that was a place team spirit builds. We had a good team. I think people enjoyed it, and the interesting thing is we keep in touch with these people, and a lot of them now are at bigger posts like Abidjan - and they complain like hell.

Q: That is often the case. Were there any A.I.D. or Peace Corps?

BROWN: A.I.D. was there. As we arrived it was closing up, so it disappeared. We closed out the last A.I.D. programs; kept a few things going. There were a few FSN employees with A.I.D. until about my second year there. The Peace Corps was there. It went up to about 50 volunteers, which is probably more than they could manage well, so they cut back to about 30 or 35. They were doing some very good things because it was almost the ideal situation for Peace Corps programs. This is a country where the level of technical skills is so low that even a Peace Corps volunteer could really bring technical expertise and technical assistance of value. They were doing some good things in public hygiene, and rural development kind of stuff.

Q: You mentioned the great drought of the '70s and '80s in the Sahel. Were things changing there as far as that went or not a concern about that?

BROWN: I go back to something I said earlier, where I'd expected to see the sand coming over the wall. Not only had the city grown out beyond the nucleus so that the walls of other people's houses farther out were collecting the sand, but in fact the rains had gradually gotten better. We were there for three years; we had one year of very good rain, one year of passable rain, and one year of no rain. I think there has been a couple years of rain since we left. The cycle has probably broken. The Sahara is not going to green up again, but at least that period in which the dust storms were so bad that the airport was closed sometimes five days a week for three times a month, or something like that, those are past, it's now stabilized. The country is still very marginal, at the edge of the climate zone. A couple years of rain can stabilize the dunes and allow people to build up their herds, and then a couple of years of no rain will mean the herds all have to be slaughtered.

Q: I think I know the answer before I ask it, but did you get any visits from anybody of particular note while you were there?

BROWN: We had, I think, one congressional visit which was actually planned, the head of the House African subcommittee, who came out. A couple of staff visits, a couple of State Department visits at medium and senior level, deputy assistant secretary kind of thing. One sort of accidental Senatorial delegation, and that was about it. Nobody goes to Mauritania who doesn't need to. The accidental Senate delegation just came in, really, to refuel their plane. I made them stay for four hours and meet with people, and they were mad at me.

Q: That reminds me, I was interviewing somebody who was ambassador to Costa Rica during the '60s before things heated up in Central America and he said the highest visit was the lieutenant governor of Mississippi.

Did you note any change at all there...you were betwixt and between Bush to Clinton. I take it this was not a subject of any great debate.

BROWN: No, there's absolutely no domestic politics involved in our relationship with Mauritania. Well, put it this way, there are no national level politics. There is some congressional politics.

Q: How about the role of the French while you were there?

BROWN: The French, ... well, it's their ex-colony...they have the traditional French disdain for anybody else who wants to sort of poach on their hunting territory, and they didn't really like the American commercial and other interests in Mauritania, so they tried to stymie and stiff us as much as they could. But they were happy with the fact that we were, essentially, falling on our own sword all the time because we kept pushing a human rights agenda which was not very popular with the government, and the French sort of laughed all the way to the bank as their companies kept beating our companies for contracts. So they didn't mind watching the American ambassador make himself unpopular in the presidential palace.

Q: Did you ever find yourself excluded, or pushed off to one side because of your agenda that you had to follow?

BROWN: By the Mauritians, no. The Mauritians were most courteous to me. They don't tell a straight story to anybody, including to each other. So the fact that they didn't tell me the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, didn't in my opinion serve as an exclusion. They always treated me extremely well. The French excluded us occasionally. The French included my wife and me and most members of the embassy socially in a lot of things, and they were good that way. We enjoyed seeing them, etc. but from the point of view of western coordination, no. The French blocked, for example, EC, or EU now, coordination with the American embassy. They simply said that was inappropriate for the EU to coordinate in Mauritania. They never did. The other EU ambassadors wanted to, but the French succeeded in blocking it.

Q: You left there in '94.

BROWN: Right.

Q: And were there any major developments, earthquakes, coups, civil unrest, etc.

BROWN: The three years I was there were almost entirely preoccupied with the shaking down on the new political order in Mauritania. Getting over the nasty things they'd done to each other during the '89-'90 crisis and trying to figure out how much democracy they were going to allow. And we had some fun. We stirred the pot a lot. We gave money to the opposition, not parties but groups in the opposition, human rights activists, etc. We were the only embassy that was stirring the pot, and since we probably didn't have anything to lose, we could afford to. The other European embassies were always looking for business in Mauritania and were not too anxious to be controversial. We didn't mind being controversial. We had fun but there were no major issues.

Q: You left there in '94, is that right.

BROWN: I came back to Washington where I joined the Inspection Corps.

Q: You were in the Inspection Corps from when to when?

BROWN: For two years. From '94 to '96. I retired in September of '96.

Q: What was your impression of the role of the Inspection Corps at this time? The Inspection Corps changes, it has different roles.

BROWN: In the late '90s we're talking about very severe reductions in budget and other resources for the Department of State, and that creates a battle between bureaus for available resources. I think the Inspector General's office had a more interesting, and more valuable, role to play in many ways than it had previously, because people looked to the Inspection Corps for, I won't say always solid, but let's say unbiased opinion about the relative value of programs and relative value of, even, embassies. We were struggling while I was there with some way of actually making value judgments about whether or not embassies should be staffed at X or Y level, or should be even opened. We hadn't developed a methodology, and each one of us who was leading an inspection team to embassy X or embassy Y, was reluctant to say, "Embassy X serves no purpose," if it just happened to be that we had an unsatisfactory visit there, or it was a bad week, and we just didn't like this embassy. We felt that until we had some sort of scientific methodology we couldn't make those judgments. But we were all in a way anxious to do it; we thought that was a real role in the State Department that the Inspector General could play, if they only had an objective yardstick - you could then go out and say this post is not doing a job that's worth having 30 people out there, or it's doing a job that's worth having more people. But we didn't really have a yardstick. They are still trying to develop it, and I don't know whether they'll ever really succeed in developing an objective yardstick. But it's a good effort.

Q: Was much of your time spent in trying to take care of personnel problems and difficulties of that nature?

BROWN: A certain amount of it is. You go to a medium size embassy with a team of four or five people. And some people will get deeper into personnel issues than others. If it's a personnel issue which affects the front office, and the ambassador and the DCM and the way they run the embassy, then obviously the whole team, including the chief of the team, gets involved. But they (personnel issues) don't run the inspection. We're looking more for effectiveness and efficiency issues, and if personnel problems are serious detriments to effectiveness or inefficiency, then we raise them. But if they're just disgruntled employee type problems, we try to solve them or refer them back to Washington for solution.

Q: Did the group wrestle with the changes in communications. We're talking about both television and Internet, I mean various fast forms of communication. Did this seem to be changed. Or was this something we were looking at at this particular time, '94 to '96.

BROWN: We tried. Every year the inspectors raise the multiplicity of communications channels as an item of concern, but once again we didn't really have a good yardstick, and it never became one of our priority concerns. I know that when I was inspecting posts, I tried to, in the inspection report, to lay a foundation of facts for people who could come back later and look at them. When you're talking about how an embassy is run, you inevitably have to ask the questions, where is it getting its information, how is it giving its information to Washington, and what channels are being used in addition to the State Department channels. So we'd make some judgments about whether or not the policy dialogue was being conducted through documents and records - documents which would then go into the archive - or whether they were being conducted on the phone, or E-mail. And that's sometimes hard to judge, because not all E-mail gets kept obviously; it gets trashed fairly rapidly. Not to speak of the E-mail which is conducted with the Treasury Department in Washington, or Defense Department people, or, increasingly, law enforcement agency people overseas. There are so many parallel dialogues going on electronically, and so little of it, relatively, is getting into the written record that it's hard to understand in many ways how the ambassador is really able to say he has oversight over many activities in his embassy. So when we found areas where we saw an awful lot of communication between other agencies and their home offices, we would just put it in the record and say, "This embassy had ten thousand messages go out to the other agencies, two thousand to the State Department. We don't know what those other agency messages say."

Q: Did you find much pressure on you to work on waste, fraud, mismanagement? The reason I ask this question is when I go to the Department of State, here are people who are dealing with major issues of American relations and the only posters you see on the walls are report waste, fraud and mismanagement. We don't have that much in the way of things to waste, fraud and mismanage compared to almost any other agency in the US government. Did you find this occupied a great deal of time?

BROWN: Well, obviously, the job and the Inspector General is to find fault. So, yes, it does occupy some of your time but it doesn't preoccupy. One of the tools the inspectors have is to send out questionnaires which are answered privately, held confidentially, and destroyed as we leave post. And one of the questions we ask is, do you have anything you want to report to us in line of other peoples' fraud and mismanagement? So we encourage whistle blowing while we're going out to post. There's some whistle blowing and some of it is valid, and a lot of it just dropping a dime on a friend. There's frankly also a misunderstanding of what is serious fraud and what is mismanagement. Motor pool mismanagement is endemic, I think. Nobody ever thinks the motor pool is fair, at any post. So there are more complaints about that than there are about things that are really serious. It's not a big expenditure of money, but we do obviously have to go after issues where there is blatant or egregious mismanagement. We turn those over as inspectors. We turn them over quite often to the investigation division, in cases where there's real wrongdoing.

Q: Do you have any stories to tell?

BROWN: No, not really. There are always stories, and there are people who like to make fairly good cocktail party stories out of really relatively mundane happenings. To be perfectly honest, I had two years of inspections at posts which were pretty well run; where we found problems and we were able to discuss those problems with the management team at the embassy, make recommendations, and sometimes get their promises to make the changes which we thought were appropriate. Sometimes we fought with them, and it got to Washington and Washington adjudicated. The system ran pretty well. As a matter of fact, looking back on my time as Inspector General, I had some absolutely fascinating experiences from a personal point of view. I traveled to countries where I would never have gotten otherwise, countries I'd always wanted to go to like Central Asia and the Caucasus etc., and lots of interesting personal experiences. And I had interesting and good inspections. But I never had an issue which really was an exciting issue, a headline grabbing issue. Once in a while you'd see things like scandals in our embassy in Dublin and Vienna. It tends to happen quite often with political ambassadors, or other kinds of rather dramatic things. I tended to inspect embassies that were run by...I think I inspected two or three political ambassadors but most of them were professional Foreign Service people. Not all of them were good managers, but most of the issues were managerial issues, and not political, not malfeasance, and not misuse of power.

Q: You said you were in Central Asia. Just about that time, around '93 or a little before, I was in Kyrgyzstan and I must say that looking at Bishkek as a post, it wasn't one of the great hardship posts, but it was like a small two bedroom tract house somewhere of the 1920s in which we had piled an entire embassy into that, and there wasn't really much to do outside. It looked like pretty difficult duty.

BROWN: A pretty austere place. We spent two weeks in Bishkek . I enjoyed it tremendously. We were there in good weather; I don't think I would have liked being there in February. We were there in the fall, and we'd go to the mountains and hike.

Q: But beyond that, how did you find the morale in these places?

BROWN: Morale is totally personnel dependent. Just to take the case of Bishkek. Bishkek had had terrible morale before we got there. It wasn't our arrival that changed it, but personnel changes had taken place shortly before. They had a new admin officer who is absolutely crackerjack. She is one of the most dramatic, dynamic, and gung-ho women I've had a chance to work with for a long long time. And the new female ambassador also related better to people than her predecessor. And the post was a happy post in spite of having some pretty evident physical problems.

Q: You left in '96. So here we are in '97, and you retired.

BROWN: Yes. I'm been retired now for nine months, six months.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. This is excellent.

End of interview